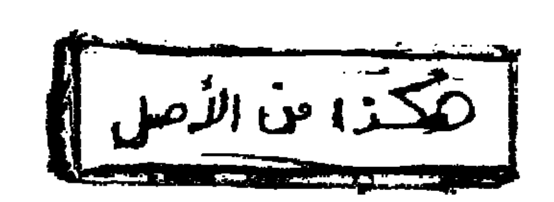


Al-Ahram Weekly

No. 308 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

16 - 22 January 1997 | 16 Pages | P.T.75

Ramadan Debates: Samuel Huntington and Fahmi Howeidy on "The Clash of Civilisations" 3



Arab hopes

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak congratulated Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for reaching an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Hebron.

Both Arafat and Netanyahu telephoned President Mubarak early yesterday to express their gratitude for Egypt's efforts *in helping* to push forward the Middle East peace process. Mubarak expressed his hope that further efforts would be made to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region.

King Hussein of Jordan said the accord was an essential step toward the implementation of the Oslo Accords but the official Syrian daily newspaper, *Al-Thawra*, slammed the agreement, saying it was the death-knell of the Middle East peace process.

US praise

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton led international praise of the Hebron deal concluded early yesterday, saying it has brought the region one step closer to lasting peace.

The European Union expressed its hopes that the accord would strengthen trust between Palestinians and Israelis, indispensable for the implementation of the Oslo Accords. France said it hoped the agreement would constitute a new departure for the peace process in all its aspects.

Getting ready

PALESTINIANS in Hebron have begun preparations for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank town. Using light green paint, merchants covered political graffiti on store-front shutters in the downtown area. Palestinian spokesman, *Nabil Abourdeneh*, said a ceremonial signing would take place, possibly Friday, with representatives from other Arab countries present.

The Israeli cabinet and the Palestinian Authority voted on the protocol yesterday, and the accord will be debated by the Palestinian legislative council and Israeli Knesset today. Although the agreement gives Israel 10 days to completely withdraw from four-fifths of Hebron, Israeli officials said it would probably take only a few hours.

UN screening

SECURITY Officials at the UN headquarters screened thousands of parcels on Tuesday, after four letter bombs were sent to the UN Bureau of the Arabic newspaper, *Al-Hayat*, and safely diffused.

The US Postal Service suspended mail delivery, pending completion of the screening of the already delivered mail. The letter bombs, part of a campaign against the London-based newspaper, followed an explosion at the newspaper's London headquarters on Monday, which injured two people.

The AP reported that a total of 14 letter bombs have been mailed to the newspaper's offices this month, including five to Washington, four to New York, four to London and one to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Only the London bomb exploded.

INSIDE

Frosty deal over Hebron

The PA and Israel initialled the Hebron protocol yesterday, but no one is celebrating as yet, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

After a delay of 10 months — of which nearly four months were spent in continuous negotiations — Palestinian and Israeli negotiators Saeb Erekat and Don Shomron initialled the protocol on the Israeli army's partial redeployment in Hebron at 2.40am yesterday morning.

US special envoy to the region, Dennis Ross, said the protocol, coupled with a "note for the record" underlining US guarantees that Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) will adhere to and implement Oslo's interim agreement, "lay out a pathway of greater hope and possibility for peace in the Middle East as a whole."

Arafat and Netanyahu somewhat frostily shook hands, but declined to speak. This is understandable. If negotiating a deal on Hebron was tough, implementing the agreement may prove tougher still, especially for the Israeli leader.

The details of the protocol remain shadowy, but, said Ross, are "fully consistent" with the Hebron guidelines in the 1995 interim agreement signed by Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. PA negotiator Abdel-Razek Al-Yahiya admits the Palestinians have made concessions to "satisfy Israel's security needs" in the 20 per cent of Hebron that will stay under Israeli army control.

But the trade-off was a US commitment to the PA that Israel will implement the outstanding issues of the interim agreement — most importantly, the three further redeployments in rural areas of the West Bank, with the last of them to be completed by 30 August 1998. In addition, says Erekat, Israel has agreed to resume Oslo's final status negotiations, open a "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank and release Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. In return, the PA has agreed to extradite "wanted" Palestinian suspects into Israeli custody, "the first time the Palestinians have said they will abide by this clause in the interim agreement," according to Israeli spokesperson Shai Bazat.

Netanyahu will no doubt try to sell this, as well as the "more detailed" security arrangements inside Hebron, as the fruit of his tough negotiating stand. But most Israeli commentators are aware that the Hebron protocol is substantially the same as the original "guidelines on Hebron" drawn up 16 months ago by Arafat and Rabin. The Israeli people may also ask themselves whether such gains were worth the delay, the loss of faith between the Israeli government and the Arab states and the international opprobrium Netanyahu's stonewalling on Hebron has cost them. This is especially so given that the Israeli leader has yet to convince his own cabinet of the merits of his "improved Hebron agreement."

At the last count, 7 of Netanyahu's 18 coalition ministers said they will vote against the protocol, including Likud members Ariel Sharon and Ze'ev Binyamin Begin. Tsomet leader and agriculture minister, Rafael Eitan, said that although the agreement contains some "positive things", he will still oppose it. "This is a very dangerous deal for the Jews of Hebron, for the settlers and the settlement endeavour," he said.

But Netanyahu's real headache is the as yet unclear reaction of the outraged settler movement in the West Bank and Gaza. Until the protocol is finally approved by the cabinet and Knesset, the Settler Council has decided to confine its activities to lobbying ministers and Knesset members not to "give up parts of Eretz [Greater] Israel to the Palestinians."

But should this fail (as it is likely to, since Netanyahu currently has majorities for the agreement in the cabinet and the Knesset), the settlers have made it clear that they are considering other options. At an emergency meeting of the Settler Council on Tuesday, settler representatives called on their leadership to stage civil disobedience protests, go on hunger strikes and put forward an alternative candidate to challenge Netanyahu in the year 2000 elections.

"The task God gave us is to stand in an uncompromising manner. If we give in, there's no one behind us. We must stand in the breach, otherwise all of the settlements will be like Hebron," declared Elyakim Haetnzi, a settler from Kiryat Arba near Hebron.

After Baruch Goldstein, Yigal Amir and Noam Friedman, Palestinians understand that these are not just empty threats. "These people [the settlers] are capable of assassinating their own prime minister," said Erekat after the protocol was initialled. Fearing settler provocations, on 15 January Arafat dispatched the PA's West Bank Preventive Security head, Jibril Rajoub, to oversee the introduction of around 400 PA police officers into Hebron, a deployment due to be completed within 10 days of the Knesset vote on the protocol.

For Arafat and the PA, Oslo's immediate future is thus likely to be every bit as incendiary as its past. But, in his first major tussle with the Likud government, it is clear the PLO leader has come out the winner. Despite Netanyahu's protracted resistance, Arafat has not only managed to make an agreement on Hebron conditional on a US-guaranteed timetable for the further West Bank redeployments. He has also internationalised Oslo, bringing Egyptian, Jordanian, European and even American pressure to bear on an Israeli government that appears to want "peace" only to an extent where it does not have to honour the commitments of peace.

(Tarek Hassan reports from Hebron, p.4)



photo: Randa Shaath

WHO CAN SAVE THE KHEDIVAL BUILDINGS? Yesterday, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak presided over the opening session of a series of round-table discussions planned by the *Weekly* and the Fulbright Commission as part of a campaign to preserve the modern architectural heritage. The seminar, hosted by Ambassador Raouf El-Reedi, was held at the Mubarak Public Library.

While Islamic and Coptic Cairo hold architectural treasures of inestimable value, downtown Cairo — the descendant of the khedives' dreams of urbanisation — is all too often neglected. At street level, neon signs vaunt the wares of spare part dealers, fast food chains and the prêt-à-porter industry. Look up, beyond the plate-glass, above the displays of gleaming household utensils, and there is turn-of-the century Cairo. Drab, to be sure, and down-at-heel — but it is there. From neo-Mameluke to Art Deco, Italianate to rococo, the residences of the urban bourgeoisie remain, peering out through the grime. Something must be done. The *Weekly*'s campaign is a step.

Inside, **Fayza Hassan** continues her series on urban architectural history, and retraces the evolution of modern Cairo: the great plans, and the facade they became. *(See pp. 8-9)*

Alarm bells in Khartoum

Government and opposition flex their muscles as the SPLA advances into eastern Sudan and battle lines are drawn. **Gamal Nkrumah** reports

In an unprecedented move, Sudan's vice-president, Major-General Al-Zubeir Mohamed Saleh, paid a surprise visit to Cairo yesterday, where he met with Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri. Saleh *is the second highest-ranking official to* visit Egypt since the visit in July 1996 of Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. Sudanese government sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Saleh briefed El-Ganzouri about the explosive military situation in Sudan and solicited Egypt's assurance that it would not aid Sudanese opposition forces militarily.

Unlike Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Egypt has taken a more cautious altitude to supporting the Sudanese opposition and has refused to interfere in Sudanese domestic politics. Even as bilateral relations deteriorated sharply following the Addis Ababa assassination attempt on President Mubarak in June 1995, Egypt avoided getting embroiled in backing the opposition militarily.

In sharp contrast to Egypt's position, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda have taken a hard line position towards Khartoum. Eritrea and Uganda have broken diplomatic links with Khartoum and the Eritrean capital, Asmara, has become the headquarters of opposition to the Islamist regime in Khartoum. Uganda is among the staunchest allies of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In an interview with Radio Monte Carlo, Hassan Al-Turabi, the current speaker of the Sudanese Parliament and leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF), warned that he did not rule out war with Ethiopia.

Al-Bashir cancelled an official visit to neighbouring Kenya to deal with the rap*idly deteriorating security situation in* eastern Sudan. Ahmed Al-Tayeb Al-Kordufani, Sudan's ambassador to the Arab League, warned that Eritrean and Ethiopian incursions into eastern Sudan will have repercussions on other Arab countries, including Egypt.

A vicious war is being waged by the 90,000-odd Sudanese armed forces, supported by regional paramilitary forces and NIF militias. The determining battle will probably be fought in the vicinity of the Roseiries Dam, near the Ethiopian border in Blue Nile Province. Other crucial battles will be fought along the Sudanese-Ugandan border, the Nuba Mountains and the Machar Marshes. The offensive in Blue Nile Province, code-named Operation Black Fox, has had several precedents. *The Kurmuk area has been overrun* by the SPLA three times before — twice during the premiership of Sadig Al-Mahdi, and again three years ago. Kurmuk was captured by government forces last year.

This time around, Commander Malik Hagar, an SPLA officer, heads a large SPLA force mainly comprising members of the 13th division. Hagar, himself an ethnic Funj, joined the SPLA in the mid-1980s. Most Funj, until recently, paid allegiance to the Ansar sect of Sadig Al-Mahdi, the Umma Party leader and former Sudanese prime minister. Today, an increasing number of Funj are joining the SPLA. The Roseiries Dam, at the heart of the Funj region, supplies some 80 per cent of Khartoum's electricity. If Roseiries falls into SPLA hands, the Sudanese capital will be plunged into total darkness. Khartoum already suffers from frequent, widespread power cuts. Rich Sudanese, government installations and a couple of five-star hotels rely on private generators for electricity.

The psychological impact of the success of Operation Black Fox is demoralising for the regime. If the SPLA cuts off the capital's electricity, the damage will not be overwhelming, but the authorities in Khartoum are taking no chances. Khartoum has dispatched several battalions to protect the dam. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) forces stormed the garrison town of Qadmaib, northeast of the provincial capital of Kassala on Tuesday 14 *January*.

"Sudan will not remain the same," warned John Garang last week. "You can win the war only in Khartoum. Garang, the SPLA leader, is also the head of the Joint Military Command of the NDA, which includes the largest and best organised Sudanese opposition groups. The northeastern front is the shortest way to Khartoum," he said. Egypt, Eritrea and Ethiopia are Sudan's northern and eastern neighbours.

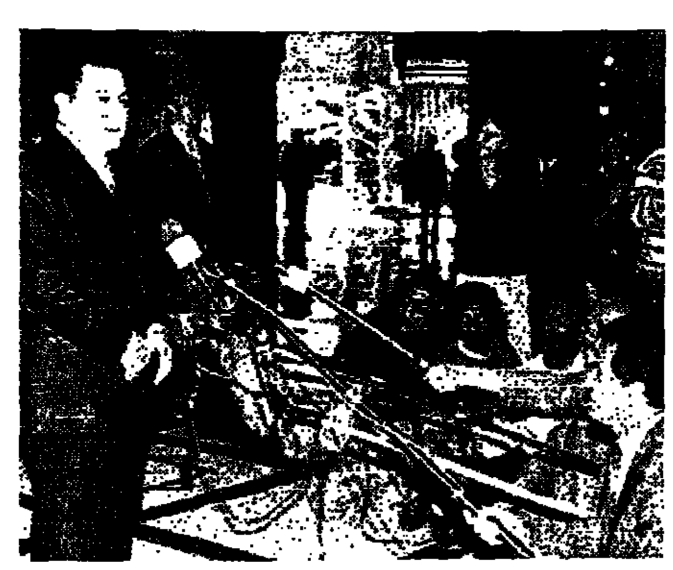
The regime is cracking down on religious opposition. "Fourteen prominent Umma Party members were detained on 12 and 13 January. Chief among them were Abdel-Rasul Al-Nur, a former governor of Kordufan Province; Al-Haj Abdel-Rahman Naqdallah, a former minister *of religious affairs; and former* MP Ali Al-Omda Abdel-Majid. Several imams of Ansar sect mosques were detained in a clampdown on religious activities not sanctioned by the ruling NIF," Bazarah Ali, spokesman for the secretary-general of the Umma Party, Omar Abdel-Daim, told the *Weekly*.

The Popular Defence Forces, aligned to the NIF, have over 15,000 regular troops and can muster a reserve militia force of over 60,000 men at short notice. University students were called upon to join the so-called "Jihad units" mobilised to halt SPLA advances in eastern Sudan.

The SPLA is some 30,000 strong, but SPLA forces are generally acknowledged to be highly trained and disciplined. The SPLA controls much of the agricultural and mineral-rich Western Equatoria Province bordering war-torn Zaire and troubled Central Africa. The SPLA also controls vast tracts of territory in Bahr Al-Ghazal, Eastern Equatoria, Jongolei, and Upper Nile.

Khartoum is brandishing the tribal card. Riek Machar, leader of the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) is reported to have left Khartoum, where he had been residing for the past few years, to Upper Nile Province. Machar is an ethnic Nuer from the Upper Nile. Many Nuer joined the SSIM in the early 1990s because they felt that the SPLA was dominated by the ethnic Dinka. Today, many are returning to the SPLA fold and are *putting pressure on Machar to disband the* SSIM and join forces with Garang's mainstream SPLA.

A greater danger to SPLA hegemony in southern Sudan is posed by Kerubino Bol, an ethnic Dinka like Garang, whose forces control wide areas of Bahr Al-Ghazal, where they have imposed a reign of terror. Garang is from the Dinka Bor sub-group, dominant in Upper Nile Province, and Kerubino Bol, backed by Khartoum, is attempting to inflame tribal disputes and rivalries between the various Dinka sub-groups.





The comings and goings in Cairo (l-r): Mubarak speaking to the press on Tuesday; meeting with Arafat on Saturday; and Ross on the same day

Cairo breaks Hebron deadlock

After a nine-month wait, Israel is to begin troop redeployment in Hebron. Nevine Khalil looks at Egypt's role in bringing about a compromise

A confident President Hosni Mubarak told the press on Tuesday that a protocol on the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron would be concluded "maximum tomorrow morning, not later than that," adding that the deadlock had been broken by an Egyptian proposal. A few hours later, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and his Israeli counterpart Dan Shamron initiated a protocol for the partial redeployment in Hebron on Wednesday at dawn.

The proposal was crystallised in Cairo during Mubarak's meeting with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and US special envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross on Saturday. Israel agreed to the plan the following day. Mubarak said that Israel seemed not to have "studied the proposal very well" until Sunday, when King Hussein of Jordan met with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

The proposal states that redeployment in areas B and C will begin on 28 February 1997, and further redeployments in the Gaza Strip and West Bank are to take place over the next 12 months. This would be guaranteed by the US, as the sponsor of the peace process. After Hussein's talks with Arafat and Netanyahu, the final deadline was extended from March 1998 to mid-1998.

Mubarak would not comment on the Jordanian role in the unfolding events, saying only that King Hussein and Arafat had called him during their meeting on Sunday to say they "wanted to work on [the Egyptian] proposal. I said 'you are welcome to.'" Mubarak reported that he told the two leaders: "I don't care who will help the peace process to move, but I would like to see results."

Commenting on King Hussein's role in the breakthrough, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Karim El-Kabariti said in Cairo: "I guess His Majesty had the logic and credibility to make his words heard in Israel and Palestine." During his discussions in Gaza and Israel, King Hussein "very much relied on the options provided by President Mubarak regarding the deadline for redeployment in the West Bank." El-Kabariti said.

Jordan's recent role led some observers to conclude that Egypt was temporarily taking a back seat because Israel was accusing it of hindering progress on the Palestinian track. However, Mubarak said that contacts between Cairo and Tel Aviv were "continuous", and that while problems were to be expected when tackling such a big issue, "we don't want this to make complications in the relationship between the two countries."

Asked about past Israeli accusations that Egypt was advising the Palestinians not to accept Israeli proposals, Mubarak said that Egypt "will never persuade the Palestinians to delay signature on an agreement. He added: "We are keen on peace, but a fair peace, not one according to Israeli terms."

Mubarak did not give any explanation for Netanyahu's sudden flexibility on the issue of redeployment, but added that the Israeli prime minister "is not alone in taking his decision." In reference to the division inside Netanyahu's cabinet over the signing of the protocol, Mubarak said: "I know he is meeting some problems in his cabinet. I hope that he can overcome them and go through with the peace process."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said on Monday that "everything depends on the implementation of whatever agreement they are going to reach. Implementation is the catchword," he added, "and we will be very vigilant" in following it up.

Europe could also help in the coming period, by sending a "letter of guarantee to the Palestinians [to reinforce] the letter coming from the United States," Mubarak said.

Mubarak's statement came after discussions on Tuesday with Luxembourg Prime Minister Jacques Poos, who said that the Hebron protocol "is one piece of the mosaic and negotiations have to continue". Poos noted that although "words are good, deeds are better".

Ramadan tragedy

A crowded bus smashed through a metal barrier to plunge off a bridge and into the Nile on Tuesday, killing at least 40 people and injuring 29, reports Jailan Halawi

At least 40 people were killed and 29 injured when the driver of a Cairo bus lost control of his vehicle at around 10.30am, police sources said. Witnesses said the bus was speeding when it veered across the central reservation into the opposite lane and crashed through the barrier of the Rod Al-Farag Bridge in northern Cairo.

It landed in a shallow part of the river near the shore and was almost buried in the mud, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi revealed, adding that the sharp drop from the bridge and the mud which quickly oozed into the bus were responsible for the high number of casualties.

Thousands of onlookers stood on the neighbouring El-Sahel Bridge in northern Cairo as rescue workers searched the muddy waters for bodies and retrieved clothes and bags belonging to passengers from the water, which turned red with blood as rescue workers used a crane to haul the overturned vehicle out of the water.

"If the rescue operation had not been so quick, the people who were rescued alive would have been dead," Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri told reporters at the scene.

It was not immediately clear how many people were on the bus, but it would be unusual for a Cairo bus not to be crammed. Traffic during the fasting month of Ramadan is especially chaotic.

The exact causes of the accident were not yet known, but according to El-Ganzouri, there was "definitely negligence involved" on the part of the driver.

Cairo Police Chief Mohamed Abdel-Latif Khedr said the driver was among those killed. Survivors of the accident said the driver lost control as he swerved onto the bridge, which links two impoverished Cairo neighbourhoods.

"The driver drove onto the bridge very fast and suddenly lost control. The vehicle hurled against the cement blocks dividing the bridge into two lanes," said one of the witnesses. The bus landed in the opposite lane and then plunged through the metal barrier.

At Nasser Hospital, where many survivors were treated, nurses and passers-by were donating blood for the injured.

"It felt as if the bus went through a big bump, and then it landed on its back in the mud," said 20-year-old Hafsa El-Sayed Abdel-Wahab, who was on her way to an exam. "Everyone was screaming and panicking."

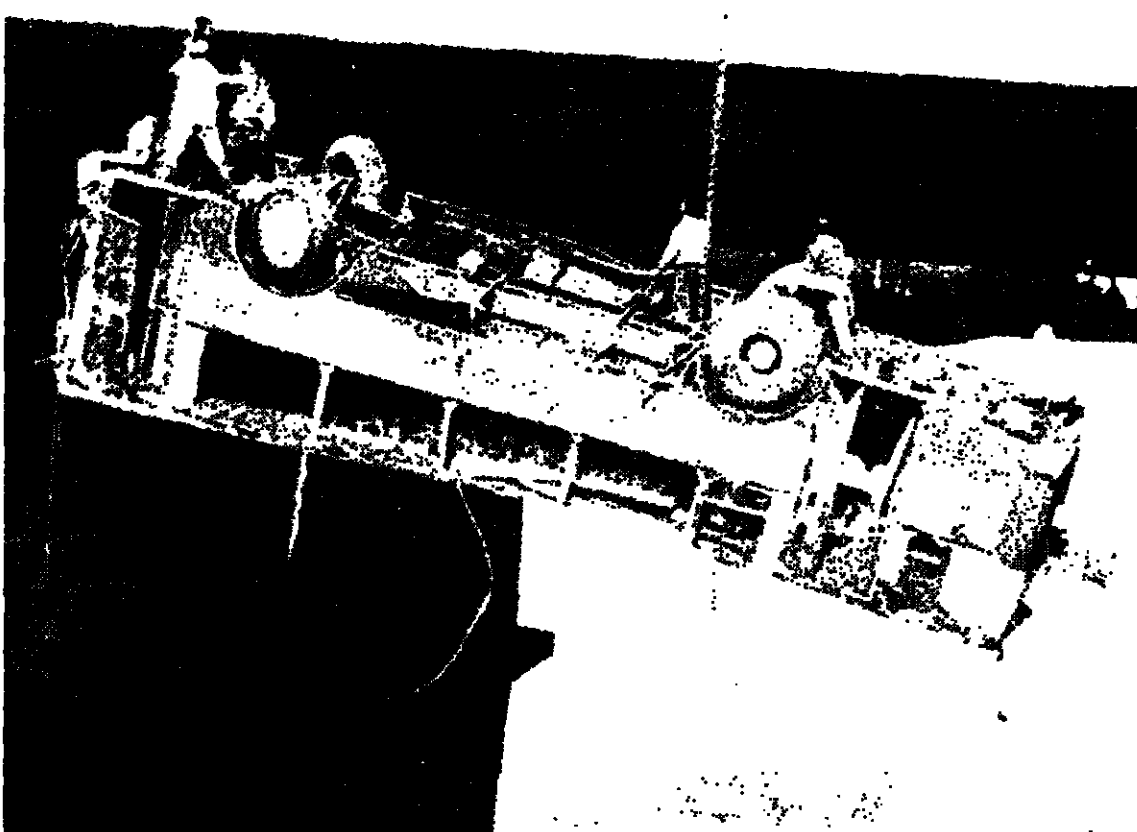



photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehiti

Shura Council debates constitution

For the second time in two weeks, the Shura Council was the scene of heated debates over constitutional reform, reports Gamal Essam El-Din

The 264-member Shura Council — an upper house without legislative power — displayed an unusual degree of openness for the second time in two weeks, as it debated a new agenda for public freedoms and constitutional reforms.

The debate heated up when independent and opposition members seized the opportunity to discuss a 46-page report prepared by a special committee on a speech delivered by President Hosni Mubarak before a combined session of the Shura Council and the People's Assembly on 10 November. Opposition members accused the government of restricting democratic freedoms and ignoring deputies' demands for constitutional reform. The fact that the report focused primarily on economic topics and did little to tackle political issues added fuel to the debate.

Mamdouh Kenawi, one of only 10 independent Shura Council members, called upon President Mubarak to dissolve parliament and convene a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution. Mubarak's "historic record of achievements" had earned him "unprecedented popularity", Kenawi said, but he went on to argue, "in order to maintain this popularity, I call upon him [Mubarak] to dissolve the People's Assembly and hold a referendum to allow parliament to be dissolved and give the people the opportunity to elect a new assembly. This assembly would be a constituent assembly, that is one entrusted with drawing up a new constitution."

This new constitution, he added, should stipulate that the president and vice-president be elected directly by public ballot, instead of the current system in which parliament nominates a single candidate, who is approved or rejected by national referendum. He called for the election of Mubarak as president for life.

Mubarak's popularity, Kenawi said, could be negatively affected by the "majority mafia" which is now exercising control over the People's Assembly and Shura Council.

"We need new political frameworks which are not only suited for introducing change, but which also reflect the uprightness and transparency necessary to tighten control over corruption. He suggested that a revival of the old 'How did you earn this?' law, which requires the rich to verify their sources of income, could help solve this problem.

Members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) strongly objected to Kenawi's use of the word "mafia". And Nabih El-Alakamy, an NDP deputy from Cairo, also objected to Kenawi's call for the dissolution of the People's Assembly. He described the 1995 elections as a democratic ballot in which "the Egyptian people freely elected deputies, and some of our deputies were even able to win uncontested. So I don't think it's honest to allege that a mafia is now exercising control over the People's Assembly and Shura Council."

However Mustafa Kamel Murad, leader of the opposition Liberal Party, supported Kenawi's call to amend the constitution. The existing constitution was drafted and issued in 1971, a socialist era, when Egypt was a one-party state, he argued. Now we have moved into a liberal age, characterised by economic liberalisation and a multi-party political system, "so inevitably there will be calls for the constitution to be changed: this is only logical."

Murad refused, however, to countenance Kenawi's suggestion that Mubarak be elected for life. "This is not a characteristic of republican democracies, but of monarchies. On the contrary, we call for amending the constitution to allow the president to serve only two terms."

Murad also claimed that the 1995 parliamentary elections "were rife with legal breaches and malpractice. They have been closely investigated by the Court of Cassation, which ruled that the membership of more than 200 deputies is invalid. This is why the law should also be amended to state that all polling stations be under the full supervision of judges," Murad said.

The exchange between opposition and NDP members became more heated when Mohamed Ragab, leader of the NDP majority in the Shura Council, and Nabil Louqa, an appointed NDP member, stood firmly against the call to amend the constitution.

President Mubarak, said Ragab, has ruled out any possibility of amending the constitution for the time being. "President Mubarak said we have other priorities, such as economic reform, and so this is not the right time to stir up a lot of meaningless disagreements by opening the door to constitutional amendment," Ragab said.

Louqa argued that while the call to amend the constitution was justifiable in theory, in practice discussion of amendment would lead to instability. "Is it the right time to open the door to allow disagreements when we have to rally behind our national projects?" he asked.

In any case, the Egyptian constitution has already been amended far more times than that of most countries, he said, implying that it was best left untouched for the present. "The Egyptian constitution was amended 15 times between 1923 and 1971, while the American constitution has not been amended at all since the last century."

Emotions ran high as Kenawi took the floor again to deny that he had told the house that the People's Assembly was under the control of a mafia.

"What I actually said was that there is a mafia which *tries* to exercise control," he said, stressing again that many of the present constitution's articles do not conform with recent economic and political changes. "If these changes were referred to the Constitutional Court, it would be sure rule to them unconstitutional."

Historian Abdel-Azim Ramadan, an appointed independent member, switched the debate into an attack on the Nasserist regime of the fifties and sixties. According to him, all the constitutions issued during the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's era (in 1953, 1956, 1958 and 1964) included very "high-sounding" words about democracy, human rights and freedom. "But this did not prevent the opening of the jails and Nazi and fascist torture, the like of which was unprecedented in the history of Egypt. In 1959, for example, a large number of writers and thinkers were arrested at the behest of the constitution. And in September 1981, President Sadat did not hesitate to tread upon and kill off the existing constitution [of 1971] for national and personal reasons," said Ramadan.

The problem with the constitution, Ramadan argued, was not one of amendment, but of application. "The constitution is not merely a matter of words; it is primarily a matter of application," he explained. Ramadan joined forces with NDP members in rejecting the opposition's call for amending the constitution. "As we are in a period when the country is swept with tides of fascism and terrorism from time to time, amending the constitution would lead to more divisions," he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Dispute over vision of heaven and hell

Despite the approval of Al-Azhar, the Censorship Board has ruled against a play depicting heaven and hell, on the grounds that it offends religious sensibilities. Mona El-Nahhas reports

A Censorship Board ruling, banning the performance of *A Visit to Paradise and Hell* by Mustafa Mahmoud, a leftist-turned-Islamist writer, is causing controversy because the one-act play had already been approved by Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi.

"I did not find anything which runs counter to Islamic principles or which would prevent its performance on stage," Tantawi wrote on 29 September. "On the contrary, the play should please Muslims by glorifying God's word, with devout believers promised paradise and non-believers warned that they will end up in hell."

Ali Abu Shadi, head of the Censorship Board since last October, met Tantawi to explain his personal reservations about Mahmoud's play. Tantawi said he accepted that it was the responsibility of the Censorship Board to make a final ruling on whether or not the play could be performed, but referred the script to Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Centre for its opinion.

Last December, the sheikhs of the research centre agreed that the play could be performed, with the proviso that a committee from the centre should watch a performance before giving their final approval, a condition which Mahmoud accepted.

But Abu Shadi asserted that the Censorship Board would not change its previous attitude towards the play, leaving Mahmoud with no choice other than to contest the censor's decision before a Petitions Committee, whose decision is final according to the law. Mahmoud filed an appeal with the committee 10 days ago.

Commenting, Abu Shadi said he would be "very happy" if the committee reversed his decision and "decided in favour of Mahmoud."

Mahmoud said he did not understand the "stubborn" attitude of the Censorship Board. "I do not know what they want from me. It's illogical to suspend the play after we received the approval [of Al-Azhar]," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

But sources close to Mahmoud believe that the board has taken this attitude to punish him for bypassing Abu Shadi and taking his script directly to Al-Azhar.

"Authors should first submit the scripts of their films or plays to the Censorship Board, which will then seek Al-Azhar's opinion if the script deals with a religious subject. But by getting Al-Azhar's approval before submitting the play to the censor, Mahmoud seems to have put the cart before the horse," Abu Shadi said.

"I cannot imagine how Al-Azhar would allow the personification of angels and the depiction of hell and paradise on the stage. The author acted as if he were God, determining who deserves paradise and who deserves hell."

Abu Shadi went on, "We have put our reservations on record and the issue is now in the hands of the Petitions Committee."

Mahmoud asserted that his appeal to Sheikh Tantawi had been made with the best of intentions and that his only aim had been to save time.

He expressed his anger in an article published soon after the play was rejected. "I do not know why they opposed the play," he wrote. "Is it because I found Marx, Lenin and Stalin worthy of hellfire? Does the censor embrace Marxist ideology?" He went on to describe the censor's role as one of condemning writers to death and their thought to imprisonment.

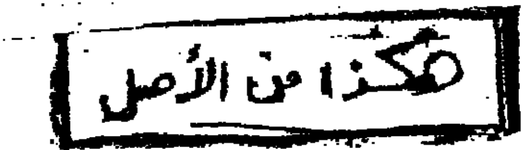
The play, which condemns Marx, Lenin and Stalin to hellfire, was serialised by *Al-Ahram* in September and appeared in book form in October. Mahmoud wrote in an introduction that his work has some similarity to *Risalat el-Ghofran* (Epistle of Forgiveness), a poem written by the blind Middle Ages Arab poet Abul-Ala' El-Me'arri. It also seems to have been inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Some critics believe that Dante's journey through hell, purgatory and paradise was inspired by the Arab poet's work.



Actress dies

Actress Madiha Kamel, 51, died in her sleep on Monday, of complications caused by hypotension. A leading actress, with 75 films to her credit, her best-known role was as a spy for Israel in *Al-Suoud Ila Al-Haweya* (Rising into the Abyss), for which she won several awards.

Madiha Kamel gave up her acting career five years ago. She is survived by her daughter, Merihan.



Battle of the bulge

Continuing the *Weekly*'s tradition of Ramadan debates, the opponents square off. In the left corner, Samuel Huntington elaborates on the 'clash of civilisations'; in the right, Fahmi Howeidy discusses the diversity of Islam and argues that cultural diversity should be embraced, not feared. Both spoke to Omayma Abdel-Latif

Samuel P Huntington is the director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard and author of the much-discussed *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Simon and Schuster, 1996). Some Western commentators have praised the book lavishly for its "flashes of rare brilliance", while others lambasted it for its cultural reductionism and the dichotomies it seems to perpetuate.

Why posit a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West?

I think that unfortunately now, for a variety of reasons, including the continued military and economic dominance of the West, relations between Islam and the West have become more antagonistic. The West's efforts to promote its values and, at times, to intervene militarily in the Muslim world are also behind this antagonism. There is also the demographic dynamism of Muslim countries. Population growth has created a youth bulge, which creates domestic problems within Muslim countries, producing migrants and creating people who are susceptible to the appeals of extremist groups. There is also the great cultural revival that is going on in the Muslim world. The Islamic resurgence has people in Muslim societies rejecting Western values and turning to Islamic values, traditions and practices. This creates a greater difference with the West.

In addition to that, we have the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism, which was an enemy of both the West and Islam. The downfall of this common enemy has consequently eliminated one thing Islam and the West did have in common. Also there has been increasing interaction between Muslims and Westerners, the result of migration, and the improvement of transportation and communications over a long period of time. This may result in a coming together, but it can also produce misunderstandings and conflict. The argument of the book is that we are moving out of the Cold War phase, when the world was divided between two superpowers and their allies, who competed throughout the world, and especially in the Third World. We are moving into a much more complex world where seven or eight major civilisations and their leading states will interact with each other. This is not a simple case of 'us versus them': in some cases these civilisations will cooperate, and in others, they will compete and at *times perhaps fight.*

It was argued that your theory fails to recognise diversity within each culture, and assumes inherent, rigid barriers between cultures.

Anyone who has looked at my book can see that I emphasise the extent to which civilisations interact and the extent to which they influence each other. In this connection I can quote the part where I say that 'civilisations have no clear-cut boundaries and no precise beginnings and endings.' People can and do redefine their identities and as a result the composition that shapes civilisations changes over time. Cultures interact and overlap, and the extent to which they may resemble or differ from one another also varies considerably. In addition, I argue that interaction and borrowing between civilisations has always taken place and, with modern means of commmication and transportation, this interaction is much more extensive now. So I do not believe that civilisations are unable to interact. They are the broadest cultural entities with which people identify and obviously there are many smaller cultural entities with which people also identify more often and much more intensely than they do with the civilisation as a whole.

You also suggested that the principal cause of the clash of civilisations is the population explosion in the Muslim countries and more specifically the predominance of young people, who are more prone to militancy and, in extreme cases, terrorism. In fact, one could say that you are speaking not of civilisations or cultures but rather of poverty, civil unrest, general human rights and Western imperialism.

I think young populations contain high proportions of often partially educated people, and this is certainly one of the characteristics of Islam at the present time. There is a relation between Islamic countries and other societies and this creates problems. For example, unemployment in Muslim societies leads to migration. Recently I was in western Europe and there is tremendous concern in Germany and France about their Muslim population and the growth of this population. This leads to nasty nationalist reactions and what I view as rather absurd efforts, for example the efforts made in France to prevent Muslim schoolgirls from wearing the Muslim headdress at school.

Demographers predict that by the year 2020 rates of population growth in Muslim countries will have declined considerably and this is reason to believe that one cause of problems within the Muslim countries, and between Muslim countries and their neighbours, will have disappeared, more or less. I might point out that historians relate the Crusades to population expansion in Europe in the eleventh century, to the dynamism and the large numbers of people who were willing to head for Palestine and invade what was then the Muslim world.

Are you drawing any comparison here between *that expansion and* the Muslim population explosion?

I am saying that a population explosion occurred in the Christian world and that was a factor which contributed to the Crusades, and then now we have the Muslims with their population growth and migration to other countries.

But are they, in their own way, launching another Crusade? No, I would not say that.

So why are they perceived as a threat, or with concern, as you have mentioned?

I cannot speak about western European society. But countries like Germany or France are not, historically, immigrant countries like the US and they do not have a tradition of assimilating new immigrants the way the US does. Hence, when immigrants from very different cultures like North Africa or Turkey move into their societies, they feel threatened.

What did you mean when you say Islam has bloody borders?

That is in reference to the fact that, as one goes around the great areas of Muslim people in Eurasia and North Africa, there seems to be a continuous series of struggles between Muslims and non-Muslims. Witness the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, in Central Asia, in the Indian subcontinent or in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East. I think in considerable measure it is a reflection of the demographic characteristics that I mentioned earlier.

But in all the examples you have mentioned, the Muslims, on the whole, have been the victims and not the aggressors.

I am not trying to pass judgment on the rights and wrongs of these conflicts. What I am doing is pointing out the fact that these conflicts exist. I might also point out — and this is something I documented in the book — that Muslims are far more likely to fight each other than is the case of people in other civilisations. Now I do not think that this has existed throughout history; again, I think this is a product of the way Western powers divided up states when they dominated Islam and the Arab countries and took over the remains of the Ottoman empire. I think it is a product of youth bulges and a variety of other factors, but it reflects the extent to which Islam differs from most of the other major civilisations in the world at the present time. There is no single dominant state within Islam. In the West there is the US, France, Germany. In orthodoxy there is Russia, in Hinduism there is India, for Confucian civilisation there are China and Japan. But Islam is divided, it has not had a core state since the end of the Ottoman empire and this I think is a contributing factor to the conflict within Islam.

You have claimed that 'it is not hard not to conclude that there is something about Islam that generates violence at this point in history'. What, exactly, is this 'something'?

It is the demographic bulges that I talked about. I emphasise that this is the case at this point in history because it is a phenomenon which exists now and in my book I very explicitly dismiss the arguments which some people have made saying that Muslims have always been militant and militaristic and have a tendency toward violence, or that Islam is a militaristic religion. I do not think that this is the case, and obviously the extent to which different civilisations may engage in violence changes over time. For several centuries, Westerners were slaughtering each other, fighting each other, expanding and slaughtering non-Westerners. Now the West has evolved to the point where a war between two Western countries is virtually unthinkable.

So how can you say that Islam is far more likely to turn against itself than is the case for other civilisations? It is contradictory, in that case, to say that the extent of violence in civilisations changes over time.

I am saying that this is not true throughout history. Conditions change and civilisations evolve, they can go through different political phases. A phase of much conflict within a civilisation will gradually tend to evolve into a situation in which conflict is reduced and one or two states dominate the civilisation. That is where the West is now, because in effect we have the European Union on the one hand and North America on the other.

But surely you cannot put western Europe and the United States in the same basket?

Of course there are cultural differences between the United States and Europe. There are even cultural differences within both the US and Europe. Because as I emphasised earlier, civilisation is the broadest of cultural identities, and within any civilisation there are many different subcultures.

Some critics have described your notions of culture and civilisation as quite superficial, because you focus on a single element, namely textual religion, disregarding the fact that religions have been subject to very different readings throughout history. This reductionism also fails to take religion as it is practiced and lived into account.

Religion is the most important element in defining civilisation, but it is not the only one. Language, traditions and historical experiences also define civilisation. When one looks at the record, however, religion is more important. We can see this in what happened in the former Yugoslavia, where Serbs, Muslims and Croats — all ethnically the same and speaking the same language — were divided by religion. I do not think that what counts is the religious text, the Qur'an or the Bible. What counts is how people interpret these texts at any point in history and I think both Islamic culture and Western Christian culture are very complicated and diverse in this respect. People can draw on different elements within each culture. Some people I know argue, for instance, that Islam is inherently hostile to the development of democratic governments, and certainly there have not been many democratic governments in the Muslim world, but I do not think there is any necessary contradiction between Islam and democracy. I have studied Islamic history and doctrine, and certainly there are major elements in Islam which would support movement in a democratic direction.

Many also argue that the clash of civilisations is a myth. They would argue that it is centres of power, not civilisations, that clash. Two of the most destructive wars of the 20th century, both brought about by Western expansionism, illustrate this point quite well.

The first and the second world wars were largely wars within the West caused by the rise of Germany and the wars it waged against Britain, France and eventually the US. As I said earlier, this phase of conflict within the West is clearly over and the idea of another war between the US, Germany, France and Britain is unthinkable. The point that I want to emphasise here is that civilisations are cultural entities and not political entities. Nation-states are the principal and most powerful actors in world affairs. They act with concern over power and security and they will act to achieve that. In the emerging world, their preferences and goals will be shaped to a considerable extent by cultural factors. One can see the realignment of countries according to culture throughout the world. During the Cold War, Greece and Turkey were allies because they had a common enemy, but now that the enemy is gone, they are resuming their traditionally hostile relations, and almost went to war once or twice during the past two years.

You once stated that the centuries-old military interaction between Islam and the West is unlikely to abate. Have you changed your mind?

It is unlikely to decline because there is a major concern in the West over terrorism and fundamentalist groups and obviously there is concern within Islam about Western military intervention in the Muslim world. For example, during the 1980s, the US carried out about 16 military interventions of one sort or another in the Muslim countries of the Middle East. So there is military interaction which, I hope, can be kept limited. While I doubt very much that there will be any major military interaction, I do not think we can expect terrorism by extremist Muslim groups to stop soon. I think that will continue and there may be circumstances in which Western countries feel they have to intervene somewhere in the Muslim world, as indeed they did after the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein.

But portraying the Islamic movements as completely anti-Western disregards the fact that militant Islamic movements are often motivated by objections to certain policies rather than cultural hostilities

First, I do not think mainstream Islam is necessarily anti-Western. Obviously, some of the extremists are opposed to the governments of their own societies, many of which of course are authoritarian and repressive.

It would seem that this clash of civilisations theory only serves to emphasise cultural differences and further divide the world. The perception of civilisations embarked on a collision course can only prolong and deepen conflicts.

I do not emphasise cultural differences. I am simply calling attention to them. I think the cultural factor has been neglected in the study of international relations, although it is a very real factor which not only causes differences but is also the basis for collaboration, as I showed at great length in my book. Common cultures bring countries and societies together and facilitate cooperation between them because they feel they can trust each other. It is much easier when there is a shared culture than when people come to each other with very different cultures. In those cases, it is often difficult to create understanding. On the contrary, there is a great deal of misunderstanding, there is also often a great deal of suspicion and mistrust.

Why do you still think Islam is more threatening than Asian religions like Confucianism or Buddhism?

The question is, who considers Islam a threat? People in western Europe feel culturally threatened by Muslim immigration and I think they are overly concerned about that, but it seems to be understandable. People in the West were concerned about terrorism and blowing up planes, taking hostages and the efforts of several Muslim governments to develop long-range missiles and chemical, nuclear and biological weapons. All these things are viewed by people in the West as threatening.

But we have Israel's nuclear arsenal on our borders, weapons that are not even checked by international organisations. If we are talking about an Islamic bomb, why not talk about a Jewish or a Christian bomb?

The Israeli bomb is not going to be used against the West and I do not think it is going to be used against anybody. It will only be used if the Arab countries try to eliminate Israel, in which case the Israelis will certainly use it, but it does not pose a threat to the West. It may pose a potential threat to Arab countries

Do you think there is a common ground on which the seven civilisations which you posited can come together?

I think that the most important message of my book is that we are heading towards a multi-civilisation, multi-polar world with different major civilisations and seven or eight centres of power. I think it is very important to attempt to identify common ideas, common concepts shared by all these major civilisations. As a matter of fact, there is a programme at Harvard where we are going to do that, bring together people from the world's major civilisations and try to identify a common element in these civilisations. I hope there are common grounds we can identify and develop.

'The Islamic resurgence has people in the Muslim societies rejecting Western values and turning to Islamic values, traditions and practices. This creates a greater difference with the West'

Samuel P. Huntington

'Because we are different from the West, we represent a threat. We should not be branded the enemies of the West just because we do not apply Western cultural models and values'

Fahmi Howeidy

At 59, Fahmi Howeidi is one of the Arab world's most controversial writers on Islam. He joined Al-Ahram in 1959 and has published twelve books on Islamist movements, among them *For Islam and Democracy*, *The Crisis of Religious Awareness*, and *Qur'an and Sultan*. His most controversial work, however, remains *Iran from Within*, which provides the first Arab eyewitness account of the first days of the revolution.

Why do so many Western thinkers tend to explain relations between Islam and the West in the framework of a selective interpretation of past historical experience?

When one tries to relate the West's fear of Islam to the reasons usually cited — Muslim fundamentalism, militancy, radicalism, terrorism, totalitarianism — it is difficult, if not impossible, to justify this fear. One must believe, however, given all the facts and expertise available to the West, that the fear is indeed rational. What is this fear that causes enemies of the Muslim world to play subtly on the theme of the Crusades in order to demonise Islam and Muslims? Let us first examine what it is not, before we draw our conclusion as to the real reason why the West fears Islam.

The first military confrontation between the West and Islam took place at a time when the Muslims' empire enjoyed great influence over world affairs. This, however, does not necessarily imply that relations between the Muslim world and the West should be interpreted within the framework of the Crusades and subsequent historical experience. On the other hand, this experience has become part and parcel of the frame of reference for Western culture, even producing certain fixed stereotypes about the Muslim world which always resurface in times of conflict. And so you have the West as the modern, secular, developed world versus the traditional, underdeveloped, religious Islamic world.

But historical experience, in my view, is multi-faceted and can be looked at from different angles. Now, if we wanted to talk about tolerance in Islam, we would recall the Jews fleeing Christian persecution, and remember that they preferred living as "protected peoples" under Ottoman — Islamic — rule to living under Christian domination. But because they want to talk about the brutality of Islam, they talk about confrontation with the Muslims. A major mobilisation campaign, mobilisation against Islam, is now taking place in the West, so they emphasise images and harp on clichés which reinforce the idea of the so-called Islamic aggression and the coming threat.

But why does the West consider Islamic civilisation in particular a threat to its existence?

To avoid exposure, the neo-imperialists, spurred on by the enemy within, divert attention by demonising Islam and Muslims, thereby fanning the fires of bigotry and raising unrealistic fears among the peoples of the West. Because we are different from the West, we represent a threat. If you are different, then you are labeled an enemy and even your presence poses a threat. By different I mean the kind of difference which should enrich human experience. We should not be branded the enemies of the West just because we do not apply Western cultural models and values. In fact, Huntington focuses on Islam only at a specific point in history. This is a superficial, restricted reading, laying undue emphasis on a brief episode — the Crusades — because this period was marked by violence. This reading is then used to deduce generalisations about Islam as a violent, militarised religion, whereas one could also interpret the same episode in light of circumstances and the means used at a given time. Huntington's reading, however, clearly shows that he has no knowledge of Islam.

Huntington himself, in fact, is his own worst enemy, because he did not read the Muslim sources themselves, although he could easily have done so. Every culture has its own frame of reference. If he is talking about Islam and wants to pass judgment on what Islam says about militancy or using violence then he should refer to the Qur'an, *sunna* [the precedent set by the Prophet], *hadith* [the Prophet's sayings]. Any respectable academic would resort to this frame of reference when dealing with Islam, but then no respectable academician would allow himself to generalise, implying that something inherent in Islam generates violence. The question of violence is very circumstantial, related to time and place. We could say there are political and economic circumstances under which Islamic communities live and which lead them to commit acts of violence.

If Huntington had bothered to scratch the surface, he would have found that Islam is in fact very flexible. For example in a country like Turkey, an Islamist-oriented party [Erbakan's Rifah] made an alliance with the secularists, while in Yemen the Islamic movement concluded an alliance with the socialist party and even with the communists. In both Jordan and Kuwait, the Islamists participate in the political process. In Indonesia the Islamic trend is not engaged in politics but rather focuses on development and economic prosperity. This means that whenever there is a chance for peaceful coexistence and an opportunity to express their opinions through legal channels, the Islamists never resort to violence. Any society which oppresses a given political group is bound to face problems, however. As the saying goes, every political system has the kind of opposition it deserves. A democratic system which allows the presence of Islamic and non-Islamic political participation may not encounter violent opposition, whereas an oppressive political system produces equally oppressive political opposition powers. There lies the difference between Algeria and Turkey.

Huntington also insists that, at the present time, Islamic civilisation is far more likely to turn against the enemy within than is the case for other civilisations...

Is this specific to Islamic civilisation? We could mention in passing the case of 20th-century European history, starting with the two world wars and ending with the war in Bosnia. These took place within Western civilisation itself. And we would also do well to recall the historic conflicts between Anglo-Saxons, or between the Germans and the French... These conflicts also took place at the very heart of Western civilisation. What kind of methodology did Huntington apply in his reading of history? Is the violence taking place in India merely a conflict within Hindu civilisation? The fact that such conflicts are not common in China, for instance, has little to do with Confucian culture; it is simply due to the fact that the Chinese have always been tightly controlled by an oppressive central power.

Finally, the conflict in the Balkans, although it involved Muslims, cannot be attributed to something inherent in Islamic civilisation. The Serbs and the Croats were at each others' throats too, Orthodox against Catholic. Huntington's assertion that the Islamic countries are likely to wage war on each other rather on other civilisations is hardly plausible.

Basically, Huntington took examples out of context to prove that Islam is a militaristic religion. If the Islamic countries are divided from within, if they are fragile, this is related more to underdevelopment rather than to Islam itself. They are fragile and prone to violence because they are underdeveloped, not because they are Muslim.

In that case, how can the gap between Islam and the West be narrowed?

I am uncomfortable when people insist that life cannot go on without an intimate relation with the West. While I might partially approve close relations with the West, I wonder: why ignore the East? The West wants to judge whether we are developed or underdeveloped, tolerant or militaristic. We may respect the West, but must we take its cultural patterns as our frames of reference? We are not anti-Western, but we are against arrogance, and more specifically against the imposition of a certain cultural model.

But Muslims are accused of not accepting Western culture.

First, the Islamic vision emphasises that people are different by nature, because God wants them to be. The very existence of West or East or the different civilisations and cultures is therefore legitimate from the outset. So we have no cultural problems with the West, nor do we have a religious problem at this point. On the contrary, we as Muslims are the ones who recognise, religiously speaking, all other religions since we are entitled to embrace them whereas they do not recognise us. We believe in Christianity and Judaism and all the prophets while they reject Islam as a religion. We believe in diversity, they reject it. I do not take issue with the West, nor with its religious frames of reference, however. My one and only problem is with the imperialist, capitalist West.

Huntington bases his classification of the world, the positing of seven groups, on a single element: textual religion.

So the West represents Christian or Protestant civilisation? Does Christianity play a key role in shaping the politics and lifestyle of the Western countries? Of course not, because religion has been massively marginalised in these societies while Islam is a predominant factor in ours. Religion is important, but there are a number of other, no less important, factors. Religion itself may be modified by a number of influences within it. For example, within Islam, there are Arabs, Persians, and Turks. How can we ignore these cultural characteristics? I cannot understand why he chose religion — textual religion at that — to compartmentalise the world.

Huntington also suggests that the principal cause of the West's fear of Islam is the population explosion in Muslim countries and the great predominance of young people 15 to 20 years old. According to him, this age group contributes to the destabilisation of society since it is far more likely to migrate to the cities, and there join militant or terrorist movements.

Huntington should realise that his approach — fuelling fear of anything Islamic — is biased and has been influenced by media work rather than the findings of researchers and academics. I agree that the 'youth bulges' to which he refers could act as time bombs, but this is not necessarily the case. Mass murderers and terrorists are not born that way; certain political and economic circumstances force them in this or that direction. Political conditions can bring out the worst, or the best, in people. Blood was spilled in Algeria after the elections. Before that, there was a peaceful way of dealing with things but when the peaceful solution was excluded and armoured vehicles appeared in the streets, the Islamists responded in kind. In Turkey the situation was different and led to the Islamists coming to power. Huntington picks and chooses his evidence, discarding certain pieces because they do not suit his reading.

Huntington attributes the Crusades in part to the population explosion of the eleventh century in the West, and draws a parallel between this situation and that of the Muslims today.

Incidentally, the Arabs always described the Crusades as the wars of the *frinj* — wars waged by foreigners, Europeans. These wars were motivated by greed. When the Crusaders arrived in Constantinople, they sacked the city although it was Orthodox and not Muslim. The Catholic Pope also played a major role in inciting the Europeans against the Muslims, so we can hardly speak of the population explosion as the primary cause of the Crusades. Furthermore, it would be meaningless to compare demographic developments in the eleventh century to the situation today. Huntington's analysis is not only ahistorical, it seeks to obfuscate the fact that population may count for nothing. There are 4.5 million Israelis to 120 million Arabs, but the superior technology and the means of violence at the Israelis' disposal reduces the demographic factor to zero in any military confrontation.

His argument regarding the huge influx of immigrants into European countries which have never been hosts to migration movements is equally skewed. If the immigrants were coming from eastern Europe, that would be fine, they would be welcome. But a Muslim is persona non grata. Why has the West waited so long to declare these immigrants a threat to its very existence? When Turkish workers rebuilt Germany after the second world war, the Turks were wonderful, but after the reconstruction, suddenly the Germans realised that the Muslims are a major threat.

The problem is that the Muslims were always there, but media-fuelled hostilities have recently set them up as a threat. In France, problems began with colonisation. The oppression of the Algerian people had to have results: France, having fanned the flames, felt the heat of the fire. At any rate, the colonial powers frequently granted the colonised peoples a European nationality, so historically it is difficult to say that these immigrants imposed themselves on Britain or France. The fact is that Britain or France were colonial powers, they imposed their rule on certain countries, and France, for instance, always insisted that Algeria was French territory and the Algerians French citizens. The French and the British benefited hugely from the colonial enterprise, and today they portray the immigrants as monsters threatening the very existence of the West. Yet Huntington chooses to disregard the past, preferring to take the present out of its proper context.

So how would you respond to the 'clash of civilisations' theory which puts Islam, according to Huntington, at the forefront of confrontation with the West?

As communities, nations and civilisations are brought closer through the imperatives of economics and technology, there must be, for a time at least, increased awareness of the differences between various religions and cultural identities. The Islamic resurgence is, in that sense, a challenge to the dominant West with its homogenising tendencies: will the West be able to respect, to celebrate, cultural and religious diversity? Indeed, the religiously and culturally diverse world that is emerging with multiple centres of power located within different civilisations demands of the West a major psychological and attitudinal transformation that acknowledges, in genuine humility, the equality and dignity of all communities and peoples. Unfortunately, instead of embracing the age of alterity with an open mind, Huntington insists on finding fault with Islam and Muslims, in which he perceives a grave threat.

All this should have been self-evident to a Harvard professor of politics and international relations like Samuel Huntington. Unfortunately, he has preferred to pander to ignorance.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Sanctions against who?

Taha Abdel-Alim takes stock of the human cost of the economic sanctions against Iraq

The implementation of Security Council Resolution 986 has now begun. It allows Iraq, under international supervision, to export oil in return for imports of food and medicine. In August of last year, the implementation of this resolution had actually been frozen, less than a month after the United States and the international sanctions committee had agreed on the measures for putting it into effect.

This had come after months of negotiations, interrupted by American intransigence and Iraqi opposition following the publication of the resolution in April 1996. It also followed earlier Security Council resolutions that sought to exempt food and medicines from the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait.

Iraqi oil began to reach the international markets only after Iraq fulfilled certain provisions. The Iraqi government completely submitted to the preconditions laid down by the United States and the United Nations once it became clear that otherwise, Iraqi oil would never reach the external market.

Now that the implementation of Resolution 986 has begun, it is of primary importance to determine whether restricting imports to food and medicine falls within the scope of international economic sanctions. It must also be decided whether this resolution constitutes a first step towards dismantling the economic blockade against Iraq, or whether the food-for-oil deal was made to foil political pressure to remove sanctions altogether, following their failure to bring about the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Furthermore, what is the future of these sanctions, in the light of American, Saudi and Kuwaiti opposition to their being lifted and the attitude of the Iraqi regime itself towards the total implementation of all Security Council resolutions?

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the UN Security Council took a number of resolutions that may be divided into three types. The first consists of resolutions connected to the invasion itself. The most important of these was Resolution 220 which was passed only hours after the invasion of Kuwait. It condemned the invasion as unprovoked aggression and demanded an immediate and unconditional end to the Iraqi occupation and a withdrawal to the positions of 1 August 1990. Resolution 287 followed on 29 November 1990 and allowed the states allied to Kuwait to use any means necessary to support the implementation of Resolution 220. It was Resolution 287 that legitimised the war for the liberation of Kuwait.

The second type of resolutions were taken against the Iraqi occupation. Amongst them was Resolution 274 passed on 29 October 1990, holding Iraq responsible for any loss or damage that its illegitimate occupation of Kuwait would cause to property owned by states, companies or individuals. This resolution provided the basis for subsequent pressure on Iraq to pay compensation to those negatively affected by her aggression.

The third type consisted of resolutions imposing economic sanctions on Iraq. Resolution 221 of 6 August 1990 imposed a comprehensive military, financial and trade boycott on Iraq and aimed to keep up the pressure for the implementation of all other Security Council resolutions. Also part of these was Resolution 222 passed on 14 September 1990. It exempted food and medicine from the embargo under the supervision of the United Nations and the International Red Cross.

The first kind of resolutions, those that condemned the Iraqi invasion and called for an immediate withdrawal, were passed unanimously. However, it is worth noting that those imposing economic sanctions did not enjoy such wide support. Both Yemen and Cuba declined to back them on the grounds that they had been passed too hastily and without allowing sufficient time for negotiation. As for those resolutions that allowed the use of force as well as sanctions to end the occupation, at least some of them were opposed by Yemen and Cuba while China abstained on the pretext of providing an opportunity for compromise.

From a critical standpoint, it can be said that the Security Council resolution imposing the economic embargo was passed after giving Iraq a respite of less than four days to implement the first resolution calling for withdrawal. Similarly, the council's imposition of a complete economic blockade followed less than 20 days after the imposition of the sanctions. This makes them the most quickly imposed and harshest sanctions since the founding of the United Nations.

It should also be pointed out that never has the United Nations resorted to the seventh act of its charter except in the cases of Rhodesia and South Africa. Even then, the economic sanctions imposed against those two states were very limited and cannot really be compared with those imposed upon Iraq. Indeed, it is bewildering that the Security Council should have imposed conditions that it knew in advance would be rejected by Iraq simply in order to appear generous by then exempting food and medicine from the scope of the sanctions. Additionally, these exemptions also had conditions imposed on them by the United Nations. The distribution of the aid within Iraq is to be overseen by the UN.

The fact is that the Security Council and those committed to it — even those who criticised the tightening of the sanctions — started from the premise that the Iraqi aggression would not be brought to an end simply by forcing the Iraqis to retreat and settle the damages. It was thought that some punitive measures should also be applied. Indeed the aim of the Security Council, as supporters of the idea of strengthening sanctions testify, was that the economic blockade should be comprehensive in order to create internal political pressures that would compel the Iraqi government to implement all Security Council resolutions. However, the economic sanctions, quite apart from their failure to force the Iraqi government to withdraw from Kuwait during the six months that preceded the war, have not led to the fall of the Iraqi regime in the six years since the invasion.

Without in any way attempting to deny the harshness of economic sanctions that have no precedent, it should be said here that these sanctions remain in effect due to the non-implementation of the Security Council resolutions by the Iraqi government. This is especially the case concerning the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction. The embargo has aggravated the humanitarian catastrophe and the Iraqi people have been made to pay the heaviest price. It has also increased the gravity of the disastrous economic situation.

According to a survey conducted by the Japanese Institute for Middle Eastern Economies, Iraqi costs during the first Gulf War reached nearly $296 billion. This led to a sharp decline in Iraqi economic indicators. A balance of trade surplus of $1.3 billion in 1980 became a deficit of nearly $15 billion by 1988. This came about as a result of a decline in export revenues at an annual average of 11 per cent during the 1980s. Furthermore, the Iraqi Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to have declined at an annual average of 9 per cent between the years 1978 to 1986. Iraq thus plummeted from being a country holding cash reserves of around $35 billion at the beginning of the 1980s to one crippled by a foreign debt estimated at around $80 billion dollars by the end of the 1980s.

Given Iraq's dire economic circumstances, the Kuwaiti adventure may have appeared as an opportunity to redress the balance. Yet, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent second Gulf War resulted in misery and even greater losses for both the Iraqis and the Arabs in general. These losses have been estimated in an Arab economic report as being around $676 billion dollars. The material losses deriving from the destruction of economic infrastructure and basic installations have been estimated at around $240 billion in Kuwait and $232 billion in Iraq. This is in addition to human and environmental losses which are difficult to evaluate and, further still, various other losses associated with a decline in economic activity in the whole Arab region.

Iraq has been trying to apply some pressure of its own on its opponents by concentrating on the suffering caused to its people by the continuing economic blockade. It has been trying to get the United Nations to conduct a study of human development in the country. It would compare the situation before and after the economic embargo in order to show the negative effects the embargo is having on the Iraqi people. An accord was signed in March enabling the United Nations Development Fund to undertake such a study.

Iraq's supporters have been calling for further action to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people. The international community recognised, in a report published in March, the decline in the health situation in Iraq as a result of a lack of basic medicines and medical resources. It has also called for $183 million to be donated in order to relieve the suffering of Iraqi citizens suffering hunger as a result of the sanctions. Furthermore, in April, a programme of the international community began for the duration of a year aiming to finance the purchase of food aid and the provision of medical and educational services to Iraqi families. However, the extent of the crisis does not seem to have been fully appreciated and the United Nations has failed to organise the necessary financing for its programme in Iraq. It collected only $146 million of the estimated $228 million necessary.

On numerous occasions, the Iraqi government has broadcast reports on the food and health care deprivations that the Iraqi people are suffering. It wants to underline the human cost of the sanctions and expedite their being lifted, or at least lightened. As part of this campaign, the Iraqi Ministry of Health announced in March the rise of the incidence of poliomyelitis among Iraq's children. Before the blockade, the rate was 25 cases in a thousand, compared to 175 cases in a thousand after the imposition of the sanctions.

A number of international studies seem to support Iraqi claims. The United Nations vice-coordinator in Iraq announced in May that the food situation in Iraq was critical. More than one million people were immediately threatened by death from starvation as food supplies were badly depleted in the centre and south of the country and all but exhausted in the Kurdish zone in the north.

At different times during the year, similar reports have reiterated the same message. The latest was published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in December and stated that the sanctions imposed on Iraq had resulted in the deaths of more than 560,000 children. Additionally, the Iraqi regime has employed religious sentiments to try and breach the embargo. For example, the government requested that Iraqi aircrafts be used to transport Iraqi pilgrims to Mecca to perform the *hajj*, as was permitted for Libyan pilgrims. This request was turned down.

A delegation from the American Centre for Economic and Social Human Rights that comprised 24 specialised researchers and a medical survey team from eight countries (United States, Britain, Canada, Italy, Spain, Romania, Pakistan and Jordan) came to Iraq to document the suffering of its citizens. It published a report indicating that the international economic sanctions imposed by the Security Council against Iraq have had a great negative impact on medical care services within the country. Further, a study carried out by the World Health Organisation estimated that the delivery of medical care had dropped by 50 per cent as a result of the lack of drugs and medical equipment and that the number of surgical operations had fallen by 60 per cent because of the lack of necessary apparatus.

Altogether, this led to a rise in the rates of illness and death during the last five years. The report of the international medical survey team estimated that 50,000 children under the age of five had died as a result of the war and the sanctions during the first eight months of 1991. Another report from the FAO indicated that the death rate among infants has multiplied six fold. Nearly half a million children have died as a result of malnutrition and the monthly average of those being admitted to hospital suffering from illnesses associated to malnutrition has also risen by a factor of six.

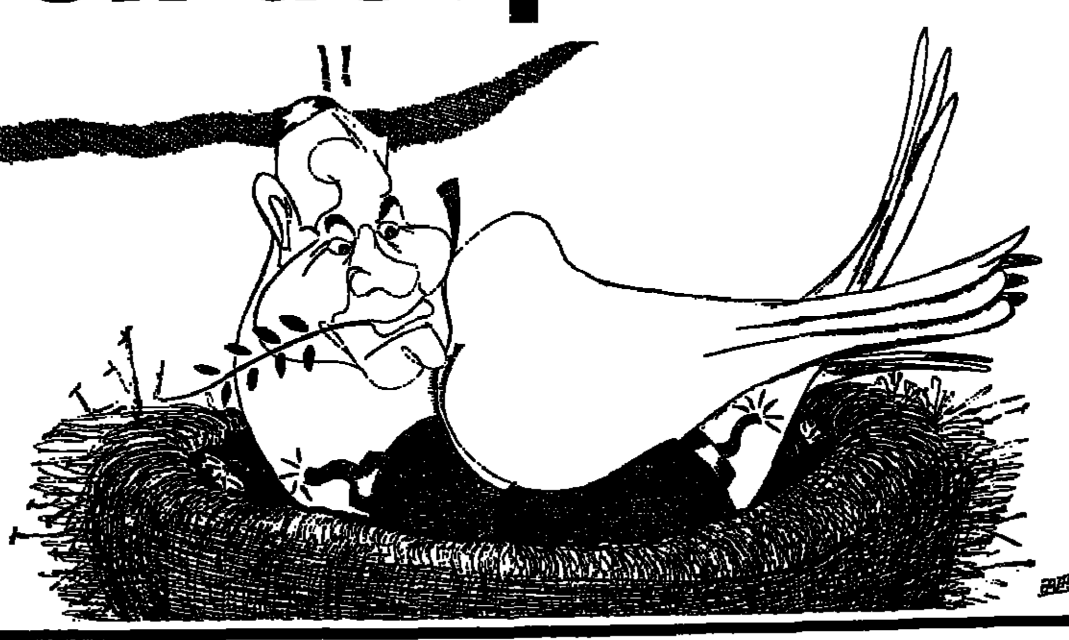
An account from a delegation of the American Centre for the Defence of Human Rights estimated that in real terms the Iraqi GDP has sunk by 75 per cent since the Gulf War. The number of Iraqis living in abject poverty has risen from five per cent in 1988 to 20 per cent in 1993. This report further makes clear that the continuing decline in the distribution system of potable and drainage water is having a terrible effect on the health situation within Iraq, especially on children, as the sewage flooding the streets of many Iraqi cities creates ideal conditions for the spread of disease.

A UNESCO study carried out in 1994 on drinking water in three areas of Iraq indicated the presence of bacteria in more than 30 per cent of samples and the World Health Organisation (WHO) found that 65 per cent of drinking water samples taken in Basrah in 1995 failed to meet required standards of purity. All this explains the startling rise in the number of cases of death and disease registered in the country as a whole. The study also indicated that agricultural production has been greatly damaged by a lack of seed, insecticide and spare parts for irrigation equipment. The decline in agricultural production is reflected in cereal output which fell in the year 1994/95 by more than 27 per cent compared with the average for 1989/90.

The writer is vice-director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Hebron despondent

While Netanyahu and Arafat were preparing, yet again, to sign a deal on Hebron, the West Bank city's 160,000 Palestinian residents seemed to have little to look forward to, save the prospect of another Israeli perpetrated massacre. **Tarek Hassan** reports from Hebron



Mustafa Al-Netsha, the mayor of Hebron, has been busy during the last few days with preparations for the redeployment of Israeli forces and the official take-over by the Palestinian Authority. Difficult as it has been to predict the outcome of the touch-and-go negotiations, Al-Netsha was not optimistic about the situation. Almost 400 Israeli settlers, most of whom have dual Israeli-American nationality, live in the heart of the city in the midst of 160,000 Palestinians. The settlers, he contends, should be evacuated from the old section of the city so that Hebron may live in peace.

Centrally located as they are, the settlers represent a constant source of instability and provocation. The mayor is calling on the prime minister of Israel and his government to proceed with the peace process and to fully implement the terms of the agreements already concluded.

The municipality of Hebron has undertaken the survey of Al-Shuhada street, located in the heart of the city. Meanwhile, negotiations about the street were becoming heated to the point that the street itself became one of the issues to be settled. The municipality of Hebron has also undertaken renovations. Streets where Jewish settlers live and the quarters they frequent have been lighted. Lamp posts have also been introduced in the vegetable market near the Abraham Avino settlement, Al-Salala Street and Al-Shuhada Street.

The brightly-lit streets are not enough to dispel the fears of Magda Al-Khatib, however. She lives with her family opposite the Al-Daboya building in the city. She is afraid of the students of the Talmudic school where the Jewish settlers send their children. She says, "We don't sleep because the students pelt our windows with stones to break them and to intimidate the owners of houses in the neighbourhood."

Downtown Hebron is the epicentre of the crisis. It is there that the Jewish settlers live and the massacres of Palestinians take place. Even though the latest shooting perpetrated by an Israeli soldier on the first day of this year caused no deaths, seven Palestinians were injured. Noam Freedman committed the attempted massacre in order to destroy all hopes for the redeployment of the Israeli forces.

The ghost of the shooting hovers on the streets of the city to this day. The number of worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque had noticeably diminished last Friday, despite the fact that it was the first of the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan. The movement on the streets seems to have subsided. Many believe that what Freedman did may very well happen again, except that the next massacre will be in Baruch Goldstein's style. During the month of Ramadan, two years ago, Goldstein fired his machine gun into praying worshipers at the Ibrahimi Mosque, killing 39 Palestinians with one round.

Tarek Zeid, the Palestinian police commander in Hebron, believes that the latest Israeli shooting was not the work of a single man. He believes that centres of power in Israel are supporting the terrorist acts in a bid to hinder the redeployment of the forces in Hebron. He added, "There can be no peace as long as the settlers dwell in the city."

Sheikh Taysir Bouyoud Al-Tamimi, an inspector in *shari'a* courts in the West Bank, notes that, "As a result of the shooting, nobody believes that life in Hebron can ever go back to normal as long as the Jewish settlers remain in the city." He urged the Israeli government to rise above partisan interests and act to consolidate the safety and security of the city.

According to Samih Abou Eisha, head of the Palestinian Red Cross Society in Hebron, it is the Palestinians of Hebron who need protection, not the extremist Jewish settlers. Presently, the residents of Hebron keep a close eye on political developments regarding the future of their city and express their indignation at the partition plan proposed in the agreement between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators.

Hijazi Abu Armelia, a native of Hebron, says that Hebron is an Arab and Islamic city and any attempts to partition it must be rejected. Instead, "The Israeli government has to remove the settlers from our midst."

The residents of Hebron fear that the partition of the area would divide the vegetable market area near the ancient Hesba and Sahla streets. A wall would be built to divide the Palestinians from the Jewish settlers. The Israelis, however, are accelerating the construction and expansion of their settlements on the site of the Osama Ibn Al-Munqidh School, dubbed the "Tomana House". The school was demolished and a Jewish synagogue built in its place. The residents of Hebron say that in spite of the redeployment of the Israeli troops, a new massacre is always possible.

Washington bent on Oslo

US President Bill Clinton's choice for a new administration team was met with considerable misgiving in the Arab world. **Mohamed Abdellah**, *in an interview by satellite, talked to Roscoe Suddarth, president of the Middle East Institute in Washington and former US ambassador to Jordan, about American Middle East policy during Clinton's second term. Below are excerpts from Roscoe's replies*

"I would tend to stress the continuity of US policy since after all it is still the same administration that won in the November election and, therefore, the basic rudiments of its policy will remain as they are.

"I would stress that the US, and I do not have a crystal ball, is going to continue the Oslo process — after all it is a solemn agreement that the US witnessed on the White House lawn. It is an agreement which the US has paid particular attention to and which Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu himself — even though he did not approve when the agreement was made — has said that he will follow through on and fulfill those international obligations. So we are hoping for the best even though one has to admit it has been pretty rough so far.

"Egypt's very strong and constructive role in the peace process is greatly appreciated by the United States. This is particularly true given the fact that Arafat is really isolated and is dealing with an extremely powerful negotiating partner — Israel. So, Egypt's advice and support is always appreciated by the US.

"The US interest in the Middle East comes from two main sources; one is the presence of two thirds of the world's oil reserves in that area which is absolutely vital to the health of the industrial economies as well as to the rest of the world. The other is the commitment from the beginning to the survival of the state of Israel in peace with its neighbours.

"My own interest in the Middle East began as a student at Oxford University in Britain. I was there in October 1956, when the British, French and Israelis attacked Egypt. The United States basically forced them to withdraw. I learnt a lot about the region very quickly, but much of my career has been consumed with these two questions: trying to bring about an Arab-Israeli peace and ensuring the stability of the Gulf, especially with the two extremely powerful and hostile forces that have emerged in both Iran and Iraq.

"The interplay of US interests in the region basically revolves around those two major areas, and of course, they tend sometimes to be in conflict.

"At the same time, it is very important to be able — in cooperation with our friends in the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] and coalition partners — to have a suitable and strong deterrent force militarily against Iran and Iraq. One always hopes to find ways of defusing these pressures, but at the moment it looks like military vigilance is the most important thing that can be done.

"I have been pleasantly surprised to see the degree of involvement of the United States in the issue of Hebron deployment. Dennis Ross is in the region talking forcefully with both sides and trying to bring about an agreement that is really necessary to moving the Oslo process forward [an agreement was signed yesterday].

"The US always worked under domestic political constraints in terms of its relationship with Israel. I think the administration will have a couple of years in which they can make more forceful representations, until they get in the election cycle again which tends to divert them. I am encouraged by the efforts that the administration is already making in the transition period and I do not see a great deal of change coming about when Madeleine Albright takes over as Secretary of State. After all she has been involved in the making of policy as a cabinet member and in expounding it at the UN.

"Again, the key is the Oslo process, and it is very important to move that forward. I think the Israeli prime minister has domestic constraints as well with a number of right-wing members of his cabinet. Meanwhile, Arafat is in a terribly exposed and vulnerable position.

"It seems to me that continuos US efforts are going to be required because Hebron is only the tip of the iceberg. There are three other deployments from 85 per cent of the land, and these are supposed to take place over the next couple of years in accordance with a fairly precise timetable, although not a precise map. That, plus the final status issues, which are the most difficult of all and which also have a timetable that is already starting to run short.

"So there is a huge amount of work that has to be done and the Oslo timetable has to be met before the end of this administration.

"Most of the US's problems with Europe seem to be involved with the Helms-Burns Act regarding secondary boycott for those doing business not only with Cuba but also with Iran and Libya. The US would like to punish Iran and Iraq and force them to change their behaviour. It would also like to make it more costly for Iran in terms of its attempt to develop nuclear weapons and Iraq on terms of its duplicity, hiding of material, insufficient cooperation with the UN mission working to get rid of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

"In the peace process I would say that the Europeans tend to be tougher on Israel. Some potential points of conflict are there, particularly since Europe is paying a good part of the expenses of the Palestinian National Authority and its development programme.

"I would say on the whole that the US and Europe have the same strategic goal, both want an Arab-Israeli peace process and access to the oil, so I do not see any major divisions.

"I agree that the issue of Boutros Ghali was badly mishandled by the US administration. I think there were a number of factors: Their problems with Boutros Ghali in terms of his unwillingness to implement all the administrative reforms the US wanted. The administration is embarrassed as it is in arrears on its UN debt, so the only way to deal with that was to get the Congress to agree. I think it is unfortunate for a major power like the US to throw its weight around on an issue like this. It seems to me that the US should have lined up a much stronger world consensus before embarking on this.

"I do not believe it is a US instinct to be a bully, I think that this was just something that got out of hand, but it was something that the Americans have to be sensitive about.

"Concerning President Clinton, I like the characterisation I read the other day that there are three types of presidents: those who solve great crises like wars, those who create a steering ship during quiet times and those who moved the government through a transitional phase unto a new role. What I heard is that President Clinton is in the third category.

"Actually, if there is a great crisis then obviously he will be tested to see whether he measured up. But I think President Clinton seems to want to move American domestic institutions in a way that would make the US able to build that bridge to the 21st century, which means being able to compete globally with emerging economic power in Asia.

"I think people forget that a lot of his foreign policy accomplishments factor on economic interests. A lot of the legacy of President Clinton will be in opening up the markets, supporting GATT and supporting the opening up of Asia, and they are significant because they increase world prosperity."

Hussein punishing Hussein?

Is the food-for-oil deal the chance for Saddam Hussein to make his erstwhile ally, King Hussein, pay for his about-face? **Rasha Saad** reports on the implications of a recent Iraqi decision

According to news reports, Iraq officially informed Jordan that it will sell its oil at market prices and not at the special rate both sides had agreed upon before Iraq started implementing the food-for-oil deal.

Over the past six years, the two countries have been bound by a special agreement, renewed annually, in accordance with which Jordan provided Iraq with food, medicine and other supplies exempt from the UN sanctions, in return for Iraqi crude and fuel oil, a portion of which at discount rates and the rest as settlement of a $1.1 billion debt Baghdad incurred during the mid-1980s. Under this agreement, Iraqi fuel and crude oil exports to Jordan totalled some 80,000 barrels a day, covering the kingdom's full energy needs.

Iraqi officials have denied reports of the recent Baghdad decision, but Jordanian sources confirmed it. Nabil Nejm, Iraqi ambassador to the Arab League in Cairo, would not comment on the reports. "All I know about it is what I have read in the papers," he said.

With the renewed flow of Iraqi oil to the world market, Jordan was seeking to increase its volume of trade with Iraq. Jordan has been Iraq's largest trading partner and has acted as its gateway to the outside world since the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq in August 1990 after it invaded Kuwait.

Jordan had also expressed a desire to increase its oil imports from Iraq by seven per cent. However, the visit of a Jordanian delegation to discuss this issue has been postponed indefinitely.

Observers believe that these new measures indicate a shift in Iraq's policy towards Jordan. Nejm insists that relations with Jordan were normal and that mutual visits between officials of the two countries were still taking place. Nejm added that "Iraq is keen to have good relations with Arab countries whenever possible."

Relations between Jordan and Iraq have witnessed many ups and downs since the Gulf War, however. King Hussein was a strong ally of Saddam Hussein during the 1990 Gulf War. Nonetheless, he shifted his policy and has criticised the Iraqi regime several times in the past few years. Political tensions between the two countries erupted as a result.

Tensions reached their peak when Jordan hosted two senior Iraqi officials, Hussein and Saddam Kamel and their wives, Saddam's daughters, after they defected from Iraq. Since then, Iraqi-Jordanian relations have witnessed many setbacks. In April, six Jordanians were killed under mysterious circumstances in Iraq. Jordan described the murders as "apparently premeditated". Last August, Jordan expelled three officials of the Iraqi Embassy after riots took place in Jordan. In November, Jordan accused the Iraqi government of killing the driver of the Jordanian Embassy in Iraq and of stealing a number of Jordanian passports that were with him. Until now, however, political differences had not affected trade between the two countries.

Abdel-Samie Zeineddin, a former Egyptian diplomat, believes that now that the food-for-oil deal has relieved somewhat the noose around Iraq's neck, Saddam Hussein will seize the chance to settle accounts with the Jordanian monarch, for what no doubt Hussein views as a betrayal.

Zeineddin added it was very likely that the first action Saddam takes after the implementation of the food-for-oil deal will be against Jordan. "The implementation of the food-for-oil deal is a breakthrough that enables Iraq to take measures against Jordan that were unlikely during the economic siege," he said.

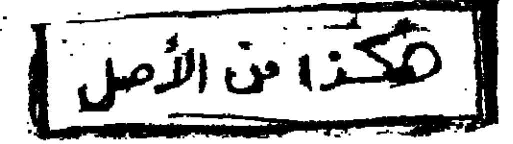
The food-for-oil deal allows Iraq to sell $2 billion worth of oil every six months. Baghdad has also expressed its intention of obtaining a quick increase in the quantities of oil Iraq is allowed to export under the food-for-oil deal.

Zeineddin said Jordan was a major loser in the 1990 Gulf War. After the defeat of Iraq, Jordan paid dearly for its decision to stand by Saddam Hussein. Not only did it lose financial aid from the Gulf countries but it was also forced to receive around 600,000 Jordanians and Palestinian refugees expelled from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It also lost remittances, earnings and exports worth $4 billion. Moreover, Jordan lost its principal Arab market due to the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi attitude towards Jordan has put King Hussein in a critical situation. Buying Iraqi oil at market prices will cause an increase in fuel prices in Jordan that will add to the economic hardships the country is already facing.

A few months ago, Jordanians took to the streets over a hike in bread prices. Unemployment stands at 14 per cent and the average Jordanian has reportedly suffered a 47 per cent drop in his standard of living over the last ten years. Jordan is afflicted by a $600 million budget deficit and a $6 billion foreign debt burden. Moreover, the peace process is suffering from a setback and Jordanian businessmen complain that they did not reap the fruits of the peace agreement signed with Israel in 1994.

It is not clear whether Iraqi-Jordanian relations will witness other changes. Ahmed Youssef, head of the Arab Studies Centre at Cairo University, believes that as long as the two regimes are in place, relations will not be stable "because there is no objective framework for ongoing cooperation. At the same time, it is not in either regime's interest to engage in open confrontation with the other."



هكذا من الأصل

The sick tiger of Asia

As the largest and most militant labour strikes in South Korea's history continued for the third week running, **Fouad Saad** in Seoul and **Faiza Rady** in Cairo attempt to discover the reason why the Third World's greatest "success story" went sour



South Korean Catholic priests, carrying candles, face riot police on 13 January during a protest demanding the ousting of South Korean President Kim Young-Sam *(photo: AFP)*

South Korean workers have been protesting on the streets since 26 December, the day President Kim Young-Sam and his ruling New Korea Party sneaked a controversial new labour bill through parliament. The bill, which will become law in March, was passed by Kim and his political allies in a secret, pre-dawn, marathon seven-minute parliamentary session — in the absence of the entire opposition. New Korea Party delegates were reportedly bused to the National Assembly before 6am, sworn to keep the session secret even from their wives and drivers.

The new law will outlaw the fledgling Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which claims a membership of half a million, give corporations more leeway to fire workers, increase working hours and delay or scrap altogether the implementation of expanded labour rights sought by the unions. In an effort to justify his move, Kim said that the country has to subject its economy to radical structural adjustment programmes if it is to effectively compete in the new global economy.

"By ignoring the need to restructure, the Korean economy has perpetuated a high-cost, low-efficiency structure that has weakened its competitiveness at a time when we are exposed to intensified international competition," warned Kim, referring to last year's staggering $22 billion trade deficit.

However, further liberalisation in the form of removing protective tariff barriers and import quotas will come at a high price, explained political analyst Larry Elliot. "(A flexible labour market) runs counter to the job-for-life philosophy underpinning the high-productivity Pacific rim economies. Employment security is out, downsizing and layoffs are very much in," said Elliot.

In response to the threat of impending and wide-scale unemployment, workers took to the streets by the hundreds of thousands in the largest and most militant strikes in the country's history. "What started out as what appeared to be a simple labour protest has blown up into a complex issue with political repercussions," Yonhap TV quoted an unidentified high-ranking government official as saying.

This week, more than 650,000 workers downed tools at auto plants, shipyards and factories nationwide, causing production losses estimated at $2.5 billion — mostly affecting the shipbuilding industry and the car industry, the sixth largest worldwide. Both are considered the pillars of the country's export economy. More than 20,000 workers marched in the southern industrial city of Ulsan, the headquarters of the Hyundai Business Group, where a worker tried to burn himself to death in protest against the "bad law" last week. At the rally, Hyundai workers called for Kim's removal, accusing the government of blocking peaceful protest rallies, Yonhap news agency reported.

As the protest movement intensified, industrial workers were joined by white-collar workers, as nurses, bank employees, professors and television workers also went on strike. It may be significant that this is the first time that blue and white-collar workers have joined forces since 1986, when the then military dictator Chun Doo-Hwan was forced to accept democratic reforms. On Tuesday and Wednesday, public sector workers joined the protests, with walkouts by employees of the state-run Korea Electricity Power Company, the Labour Ministry, Korea Telecom, the Korean mint, the railways, the metro, and the postal service.

The government's response was swift and to the point. Riot police teargassed, *clubbed and manhandled* protestors, while warrants were issued for the arrest of more than 100 trade union leaders. Kwon Young-Kil, head of the militant KCTU, and six other trade unionists sought refuge at Myongdong Cathedral in central Seoul, turning it into the union's headquarters. Meanwhile, workers cordoned off the cathedral to stop police from serving arrest warrants. Outraged by the brutal repression of the workers and the government's unorthodox railroading of the law through parliament, South Korean catholic priests and nuns have demanded that the president apologise and abolish the law. When Kim showed no sign of relenting on Tuesday, about 1,000 nuns, priests and workers held a special mass at Myongdong Cathedral in support of the strikers. "We picked the wrong president" and "We don't want a dictatorship", read two banners hung on the red-brick cathedral's facade.

International labour and human rights organisations have also come out in support of the workers, denouncing human rights violations and claiming that the new law would violate international labour agreements to which South Korea is a signatory. A delegation led by Marcello Malentach, secretary-general of the International Metal Workers' Union, came to Seoul and pledged an international campaign against the new law, asking members to deluge South Korean embassies with protest letters. And John Evans, from a union advisory committee to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), suported union charges that the new law violated International Labour Organisation norms. In response to the show of labour solidarity, South Korean officials accused the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) — which had filed a complaint against the law with the International Labour Organisation in Geneva — of "interference" and "reprehensible complicity" with local unions, while press reports carried hints of the possible deportation of the delegates, AFP reported.

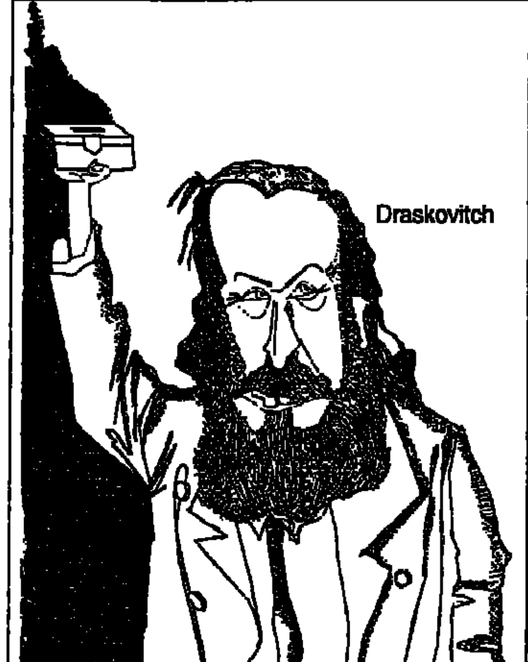
Many analysts explain Kim's unyielding position in terms of intense recent US pressures to deregulate the economy. Despite being in the US orbit since its inception in 1945, South Korea has maintained one of the world's most protected and nationalistic markets — a plausible reason for its economic success story and strong growth rate. Currently, the Korean economy ranks eleventh in the world. In 1993, South Korea ranked as the first ship producer with a 39 per cent share of the global market; it was the fifth largest manufacturer of textiles, petrochemicals, electronics, steel products and motors. Another indicator of prosperity, the average life span, increased from 59.9 years in 1960 to 70.4 years in 1993, and illiteracy has been practically eradicated.

"The economy of South Korea could perhaps be most accurately described as a 'command capitalist' regime, where the state built up industry not only by putting into place trade and investment regimes favouring domestic enterprises, but also by engaging in production itself, with singular success," wrote economist Walden Bello. An example of this thriving state-managed production line is the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO), which became one of the most efficient steelmakers worldwide. As a result, POSCO was instrumental in transforming Korea from an "exporter of labour-intensive commodities to an exporter of higher value-added, technology-intensive products, since it was able to provide related industries with a steady supply of steel products at low prices, thus sharpening Korea's competitive edge in such industries as shipbuilding, automobiles, construction and electronics," explained development specialist Doug Bandow.

When South Korean industries, particularly the high-tech and auto producers, started challenging comparable but higher-priced American *products, the US cornered the Koreans into deregulation. Angry* at the state-imposed protective tariffs and import quotas which kept them out of the South Korean market, the US went on the economic war path and issued anti-dumping orders on Korean picture-tube imports. This severely *restricted Korean television imports* into the US, dealing a heavy blow to the industry. The anti-dumping measures were further reinforced by so-called "voluntary export restraints (VERs), a system of self-imposed quotas "voluntarily" adopted by exporting countries under threat of retaliation from the importing country. Feeling the brunt of South Korea's highly competitive steel industry, the US slapped South Korea with 16 VERs on all its steel and steel products between 1980 and 1991 — the highest quota of VERs ever imposed on any country. VERs imposed on Korean steel, limited imports to the US market to less than two per cent of total steel imports.

After severely restricting imports of South Korean products, the US pried open the Korean market under the threat of trade retaliation. This strategy resulted in the US-Korea Super 301 Agreement, under which Korea agreed to liberalise foreign investment procedures. By 1992, about 98 per cent of industrial areas and 62 per cent of the service sector had been opened to foreign investment. According to the US Department of Commerce, American transnationals are targeting agriculture, telecommunications, maritime services, financial services, the fishing industry and cosmetics, among other sectors.

For the transnationals, the unresolved problem remains South Korean labour. Comparatively high-priced, workers are also "inflexible" because they enjoy relative job security. Hence the need to issue new labour laws in tune with the demands of globalisation: a flexible, more competitive, cheaper labour force — hired and fired at will.





Clinton's Middle East moves

Should we expect American policy towards the Middle East to change as a result of the 1996 election results? asks **Hassan Nafaa**

The possibility exists that United States President Bill Clinton will now direct greater efforts towards the field of foreign policy, considering it, as any president in his second term would, the field in which he is most likely to leave his mark on history. If this view is correct, then the Middle East surely presents the most tempting target for Clinton's attention, for reasons that are obvious. Clinton, however, has no great experience in the field of international affairs even though he may be supposed to have gained some experience during his first term. Therefore, he will still be relying heavily on his assistants in this field, especially the threesome of Albright, Berger and Lake. In other words, his secretary of state, his national security adviser and the head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The fact is that not one of them may be considered an expert on the Middle East, or even, by virtue of their education, professional experience or political connections, capable of understanding the Arab stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the contrary, all of them, by the nature of their political ambitions and their personal and party links, are closer to understanding and defending the Zionist point of view. Above all, Madeleine Albright, because of her office and Clinton's need for her to balance his domestic policy (both as a woman and as a politician acceptable to the Republicans), is in a position that will allow her to play a major role in American foreign policy in the coming term.

Albright's appointment has raised some concern in Arab circles, as reflected in the Arab press. This is because of her role and personal views in the matter of the re-election of Boutros Ghali and also because of her known links with Zionist circles in the United States. While still a child, she and her family were forced to flee twice, once from the Nazis, then again from the Communists. Consequently, a hatred of totalitarian regimes is deeply entrenched in her personality. She has scant previous experience of the Arab world and the prevailing view in America seems to be to pass rather arbitrary judgment on Arab regimes — especially Iraq and Libya. It is to be expected, therefore, that she will take a harder line than her predecessor, especially as she defends, publicly and without hesitation, the use of military force to gain political ends.

From this picture, correctly sketched by the Arab press, comes the impression that Clinton's team in the second term will support Israel even more than during his first term. And the first term already represented the greatest American support for Israel in history. Yet the picture is not complete unless we add another factor. Clinton backed Peres and not Netanyahu during the Israeli election campaign and the relationship between the two men is by no means entirely clear. Therefore, the question is no longer one of American support for Israel, as that has been quite superseded by the concern to bring about peace in this region most vital to the world in general, and US interests in particular. Nor should it be forgotten that at the start, all the pressure is directed at the Arab parties, spurring them to make territorial concessions in order to "rescue" a peace process that is at risk of collapsing altogether.

Yet the "concessions" that Netanyahu wants are patently more than any Arab regime, whatever its friendship with or subjugation to the United States, is capable of giving. Indeed, any form of submission is the worst means of achieving permanent peace, even from the point of view of the United States itself. Bringing about peace and supporting Netanyahu at one and the same time may prove a balance difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. This is the true challenge that will face the American administration in the coming term. Yet, Madeleine Albright, when she takes up her new post, may turn out to be the person most capable of rising to the challenge, known as she is for her forceful character and her defence of what she believes to be right.

Nonetheless, I expect that the Arab states in the coming three months will face a difficult period in their dealings with the "old/new" American administration. *If they manage to demonstrate* that *Israel is solely responsible for* blocking the peace process and at the same time convince the United States that its interests in the Arab world will be seriously threatened if there is not some fundamental progress, then the Americans will have no option but to apply the necessary pressure on Israel in order to rescue the process from its present malaise.

Previous experience suggests that Israel will not sit back with her arms folded. In all probability, if she feels that pressure is being applied, she will attempt to escape from under by increasing pressure of her own, militarily on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts and politically on the "Egyptian" front. Having faced down all parties, she will then re-negotiate and from a position of strength attempt to obtain the territorial concessions she wanted in the first place. Indeed, even this may not be necessary. It will suffice for Israel to involve America directly on the Iranian front, especially in the light of new information indicating that Iran may have been behind the "news event" in Saudi Arabia that counted tens of American soldiers amongst its victims.

Thus, directing a blow against Iran would represent indirect pressure on Syria and Lebanon. Such actions and reactions would perhaps move the centre of tension to the Gulf once again, thus relieving pressure from Israel by directing world attention onto "international terrorism." It is clear that the American administration in its present form is prepared for such an eventuality. Therefore, the pro-Israel lobby in the US will become very important simply because of its support for movements in this direction.

The truth is that there is always a dilemma in the analysis of the relationship between America and Israel. The researcher always tackles such issues as the "Arab-Israeli conflict" or the "Middle East crisis", yet when he turns to American foreign policy, he immediately discovers that American-Israeli relations lie, in fact, at the core of American domestic policy. When events change and dictate that the only choice facing the American administration is to apply pressure on Israel in order to protect the United States' interests, the outcome of that battle will be settled nowhere other than within the United States itself.

The question remains: Will the Arabs be capable of ordering their international relations during the coming term in such a way as to make that choice the only one facing the new American administration? The answer lies beyond the range of this article.

The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Fighting for a trading foothold

The real dangers of global trade liberalisation are yet to come, warned the minister of supply and trade, Ahmed Guweili, in parliament this week. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports


Guweili addressing the People's Assembly *photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehiti*

Minister of Supply and Trade Ahmed Guweili, briefing parliament's Economic Committee this week on the current state of Egyptian trade, warned that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is seeking to assume an upper hand in determining international economic policies at the expense of Third World countries. Egypt is one of 128 countries who signed the 1995 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) establishing the WTO.

According to Guweili, the WTO meeting in Singapore last December saw a number of developed states, especially the US and some European countries, giving themselves the right to exercise control on development and investment plans in the Third World.

"Most people think that the greatest danger of the WTO agreement lies in exposing Third World developing countries to an influx of foreign goods from the developed countries as a result of obligatory reductions of custom tariffs. To me, however, the most serious dangers of the WTO are yet to come," said Guweili. At the Singapore meeting, he said, a number of developed capitalist countries proposed that the WTO agreement should not be confined to liberalising foreign trade through reducing custom tariffs, but should be extended to investigating labour and environment conditions, investment and development plans and even human rights violations.

"For example, countries which in Western terms are considered as not respectful of human rights or as forcing employees to work in difficult conditions, could be deprived from exporting to other WTO member-countries," said Guweili.

This, in Guweili's view, means that rich countries, in their attempt to protect their production from competition, may try to make use of such legitimate questions as human rights to place obstacles before the exports of developing countries. "It is clear they are trying not only to shackle our feet, but also to muzzle our mouths," Guweili said.

Although this proposal was firmly opposed by two nations, Egypt and Pakistan, other developing countries approved it for fear of damaging their relations with the US and European nations. "We objected because inspecting human rights, labour conditions and investment policies should be the responsibility of the United Nations, World Labour Organisation and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)," said Guweili.

Guweili also indicated that developed countries have frequently used the WTO's anti-dumping regulations to wage trade wars against developing countries. "Last year, for example, a number of European countries, under the pretext of anti-dumping, banned the export of large quantities of Egyptian potatoes to Europe," said Guweili.

For these reasons, Guweili argued, measures should be taken immediately to raise the competitiveness of Egyptian goods on the world market. He cited a balance of trade deficit of LE28 billion last year, with Egypt's import bill reaching LE40 billion, against an export value of a mere LE12 billion. Even worse, Guweili added, the volume of imports is increasing by approximately 12 per cent a year. This was not all bad news, however, the trade minister pointed out, since "only 20 per cent of imports are in the form of consumer goods, while 80 per cent are capital goods necessary for boosting local production and raising exports."

Other hopeful signs, according to Guweili, lay in the concerted effort being made to raise Egyptian exports by 10 per cent a year, over the coming five years. The changing composition of Egyptian exports was another reason for optimism, he felt. Manufactured goods, such as ready-made garments, engineering and food products currently account for more than 50 per cent of Egyptian exports, said Guweili. "This is good progress because in the past, oil accounted for almost all of Egyptian exports," said Guweili.

Meanwhile, Guweili said, the Ministry of Supply and Trade is focusing on raising exports to African, Arab and Southeast Asian countries. In Africa, the ministry is coordinating with Egyptian private sector companies to open a number of regular shipping lines between Egyptian and African ports. He added that a number of insurance export-risk guarantee companies will be established and several Egyptian banks are in the process of opening branches in some strategic African countries such as Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire.

With regard to Southeast Asian countries, Guweili indicated that Egypt is focusing on the Chinese market in particular. According to Guweili, Chinese exports to Egypt last year rose to LE13 billion, while Egyptian exports to China were only in the area of LE500 million. "For this reason, we organised several successful fairs of Egyptian products in Chinese cities last year and are planning to organise an additional one in April this year."

He added that a number of trade agreements were concluded with China last year to raise the volume of trade between the two countries. These include establishing a combined Egyptian-Chinese factory for producing raw materials for medications in Egypt, while the Egyptian Sugar and Integrated Industries Company was contracted to rehabilitate a number of sugar-producing factories in China.

Additionally, China agreed to act as a gateway for Egyptian exports to other parts of Asia. According to Guweili, Egypt has succeeded, in the last few years, in diversifying its exports to Asian countries. As a result, Egyptian exports now include ceramics, aluminum products, cotton, leather and rubber shoes, macaroni, ready-made garments and even sweets. Furthermore, a number of private export companies have zeroed in on the fact that a large number of Muslims live in Asia and have begun exporting huge quantities of dates and citrus products to China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

As for Arab countries, Guweili indicated that in addition to Egypt's free trade agreement with Jordan last May, it hopes to conclude other, similar agreements with Morocco, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. He said a private Egyptian-Saudi company (with a capital of $10 million) has been set up to boost trade between the two countries.

In another direction, negotiations are currently being conducted to reach free trade agreements with the United States and Canada.

In quality terms, Guweili emphasised that the Supply and Trade Ministry has recently taken great steps toward upgrading product quality and adopting more sophisticated strategies in marketing. A TradeNet has been established and is now linked with 116 international trade nets and 60 Egyptian commercial representation offices all over the world to provide Egyptian exporters with the most up-to-date information on export opportunities. The Supply and Trade Ministry is also training a number of private companies in export and marketing technologies.

Guweili also indicated that a special agency has been established to fight dumping and subsidies. "This agency will not only be responsible for training personnel in the investigating of dumping practices against Egyptian products, but will also be acting as a law office for defending Egyptian companies accused of dumping in other countries," Guweili said.

Local or foreign — does it matter?

While economists agree on the advantages of divesting state enterprises to anchor investors, they differ on whether this investor should be Egyptian or foreign. **Shereen Abdel-Razek** reports

The government recently revealed a plan to sell 40 companies to anchor investors during 1997. The plan marks a dramatic change in privatisation strategy. Since the privatisation programme was initiated six years ago, a mere six of the over 60 public sector companies that were privatised were sold to anchor investors.

The government sells to anchor investors when looking for an entity which is able to bring in new equipment, introduce new technologies and which has enough expertise in the company's field to turn it around. Despite the practicality of this technique, the question of the anchor investor's nationality has led to a debate among economists.

(Million LE)
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
El-Nasr Bottling company
Pepsi Cola
Steam Boilers
El Maco
Al-Ahram Beverages
El-Nasr utilities

Gouda Abdel-Khalek, professor of economics at Cairo University and head of the economic committee of the leftist Tagammu Party, was in favour of privatisation by sale to anchor investors. This type of privatisation provides the company with the necessary liquidity to upgrade its equipment and to introduce new technology. Abdel-Khalek went on to caution however that deciding "whether the anchor investor is an Egyptian or a foreigner is a political decision." He gave the example of certain industries related to national security, such as the mills and military industries, which should not be acquired by foreign entities.

"Foreign investors are usually multinational corporations — political entities with strategic goals which might contradict national interests," Abdel-Khalek said.

Adel El-Labban, managing director of Commercial International Bank, disagreed. A foreign anchor investor need not be a multinational company, he pointed out, suggesting that, in fact, much of Egypt's industry and service sector attracted only medium-sized foreign investors from South East Asia and Europe.

El-Labban, addressing a seminar held recently by the Egyptian Businessmen Association (EBA), said that since foreign investors' operations are regulated by domestic legislation, which restricts monopolistic practices, there was no reason to fear any harm to the national economy.

Neither was the sale of public enterprises to the Egyptian private sector a viable option, according to El-Labban. The Egyptian private sector, which consists primarily of industrial, family-managed companies with turnovers ranging between LE50-120 million and investments of LE30-40 million, are neither able nor interested in buying up public sector companies, he argued. Rather, he added, they prefer to use their money to expand their own businesses than to invest in debt-burdened public sector companies.

El-Labban's second reservation is that the Egyptian private sector lacks what he calls a "genuine corporate structure." The owner of a company is its manager and the board of directors consists of his friends and relatives. The restructuring of a previously state-owned entity requires a lot of time and effort. "This is sometimes impossible in light of the low number of managerial cadres available in those family-managed companies," he said.

Mohamed Bakir, head of the privatisation unit of the Holding Company for Housing, Hotels and Cinema (HCHHC), believes that the nationality of the anchor investor does not matter as long as he is capable of restructuring the company both technically and financially.

HCHHC recently sold 75 per cent of its subsidiary, Al-Ahram Beverages Company (ABC), Egypt's sole producer of beer, to a group of foreign investors which includes the Danish brewery, Carlsberg.

Bakir pointed out that when his company considered selling ABC they searched for a large company, either foreign or Egyptian, which was capable of upgrading its production lines. "We chose the foreign bidders because we found their technical bid the most suitable," Bakir said.

Wiring Egypt by 2002

An ambitious mega-project is underway to upgrade Egypt's telecommunications system, introducing advanced digital multi-services nationwide. **Aziza Sami** reports

By the beginning of the next millennium, the nation's telecommunications network will boast an additional five million lines. And state-of-the-art technology will allow subscribers to use enhanced telecommunications services such as voice mail.

These plans are part of Arento's — the national telecommunications company — ambitious five-year plan to upgrade its public network. Dubbed the "Mega-project Approach" by Arento, the plan envisages the installation of an additional five million lines to the already existing 9.6 million lines by the year 2002. Thus the current teledensity rate of seven per cent will double to 14, placing Egypt among the top nations in terms of teledensity.

The five-year plan will be managed by Arento. Technology and equipment will be provided by the company's key suppliers including the global telecommunications conglomerates Siemens, Alcatel Telecom and AT&T.

Originally, the plan was to add 2.5 million lines. But in view of the expected increase in demand for advanced multi-purpose services from investors, it was decided to double the number of new lines, according to Arento Chairman, Osman Lutfi.

There was no formal bidding procedure for the project. In addition to Arento's three regular suppliers, who are already operating in Egypt, there is room for a fourth partner in view of the large scale of the project.

Each of the three multinationals has submitted a proposal to Arento defining its scope of work which will cover specific geographic areas in the Delta and Upper Egypt. These proposals involve a detailed study of the existing network. Work will be executed in phases for an integrated network.

"The key issues here are network expansion in compliance with data supplied by Arento, improvement of the call completion ratio, enhancement of services offered to subscribers, and the provision of the same set of features to all subscribers irrespective of their location," said Vincenzo Nesci, Alcatel Telecom's Country Senior Officer for Egypt, Kuwait and Sudan.

"Alcatel's specific plan covers nine governorates, with Siemens and AT&T each presenting a plan for their prescribed areas. Our plan will extend new value-added services to all customers in both rural and urban areas, using the latest digital technologies such as voice mail," explained Nesci.

The Arento mega-project will introduce an "intelligent architecture network", which will make possible the implementation of enhanced services such as remote units. Simultaneously it will rid the system of cumbersome installations such as exchange units and massive networks of copper cable connecting subscriber areas. These will be replaced by a remote switching unit connecting subscribers to the cable network.

The plan also envisages overcoming current problems in the network by "the expansion of solutions in all segments of the network, and in switching and transmission, in addition to dealing with the problems arising in the subscriber network, as well as a maintenance plan in order to avoid depreciation as the system comes into use," according to Nesci.

Negotiations are currently underway for the project's funding. A financial package, which will be provided by Egyptian and international banks, is expected to materialise some time next March, after the scope of work has been defined.

The overall costs of the plan have not been determined yet. Arento will model its financing approach on its successful installation of mobile phone services. The approach there was to first get the system operating and then utilise the revenues from the new lines in order to help cover costs.

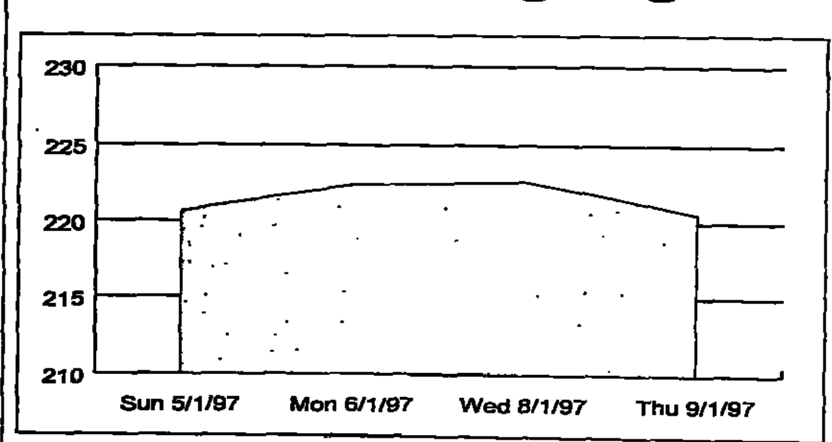
Despite its large scale and ambitiously high target, the plan is expected to operate smoothly, given the great strides made in telecommunications in Egypt over the past 15 years and the familiarity of the three suppliers with the existing public network.

"Arento has used an intelligent policy in its coordinated manner of installing the equipment which has led to a high rate of success in its telecommunications approach," said Nesci.

In a bid to gain the technological know-how, Arento's industrial subsidiary, the Egyptian Telephone Company has signed a transfer of technology agreement with Alcatel Telecom for the local manufacturing of rural exchanges and telephone sets. The Egyptian Telephone Company has already manufactured two generations of PABXs and two generations of telephone sets.

Market report

GMI running high



FOR the second week running, the General Market Index (GMI) recorded an increase, settling at an even 324 points for the week ending 9 January. Meanwhile, the value of market turnover closed at LE272.16 million, compared to LE364 million the previous week.

Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation acquired a 12.93 per cent stake of the overall market turnover as LE3.5 million worth of its shares changed hands. Yet, the picture was not entirely rosy; its share value plunged by LE7.55, settling at LE542.45.

Ameriya Cement cornered 14.71 per cent of the market activity, trading 416,158 shares and gaining LE6.06 a share to close at LE72. Alexandria Spinning and Weaving company gained 54.84 per cent and settled at LE48.

Although its general index declined by 3.41 points, the financial sector performed well during the week. The Egyptian Gulf Bank recorded the highest increase in share value, which doubled to end at LE10.02. Commercial International Bank (CIB) share transactions were energised by rumours that the bank is considering increasing its capital; it witnessed a slight increase of LE0.01 to end at LE600. The Egyptian American Bank was the biggest loser; shares plummeted by 18.45 per cent, closing at LE149.64.

Overall, the number of companies that witnessed a decrease in share value was 16, compared to 61 companies which gained ground and 22 which remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Investment-friendlier

A NUMBER of decisions designed to create an investment-friendly environment were taken early this week by cabinet ministers.

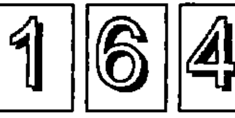
Foremost among these is a decision to unify all bodies dealing with investors on the governorate level. Investors will have to deal with only the local investment office of each governorate, which will have sole responsibility for issuing final approvals of projects without referring investors to other authorities.

Other decisions will make it easier to set up and implement investment projects. For example, representatives of the various ministries in investment offices will be authorised to give the green light for projects to begin. It was also decided that a council would be created in each governorate, headed by the governor, to meet every other week to look into projects presented by investors.

The cabinet approved a national plan to establish a number of new airports and to rehabilitate old ones at a total cost of LE751 million. Among the airports to be rehabilitated are the airports of Hurghada, Sharm El-Sheikh, Luxor, Aswan, Taba, West Alexandria as well as the local airports of Tor, Arish, Port Said, Abu Simbel, the New Valley and Marsa Matrouh.

The cabinet decided to allow the private sector to build three new airports. These will be located in Marsa Alam, El-Alamein and Dahab. In addition, a number of military airports will be developed for civil use including Ras Benas, Siwa and Quesna, as well as a number of airports in oil-rich areas in the Gulf of Suez.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



A series of travel articles that appeared in *Al-Ahram* in 1901 are enlightening to the modern reader, not only because the author's destination — the Arabian Gulf — was highly unusual for the well-to-do Egyptian traveller of the time, but because he stumbled into the middle of a conflict over Kuwait between the Ottomans and the British. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** tells the story as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*



Bayoumi Ibrahim remains unknown to us today other than as 'the Egyptian tourist', his by-line for a series of articles, the first of which was entitled "Excerpts from a Journey" and the second two "The Najd and Kuwait".

These articles form a unique record. Firstly, the places they describe represent an anomaly in the general run of tourist destinations for well-to-do Egyptians of that era, who preferred Lebanon or Europe, particularly France. To head for the Gulf "to visit Kuwait and then strike northwards toward Basra, Suleimaniya and Mosul and then return homeward bound," was an unusually long and arduous journey.

Bayoumi's articles are also important as historical documents. His expedition to Kuwait coincided with crucial developments in that country's history. Kuwait at the time was the object of international rivalries for territorial and maritime control in the Gulf region. In its attempt to secure hegemony over the northern tip of the Gulf, Great Britain signed a treaty in 1899 with the Kuwaiti ruler Mubarak Ben Al-Sabah. This arrangement provoked the Ottoman government to incite Ibn Al-Rashid, the ruler of the Najd, to retaliate against the Kuwaiti ruler, who suffered a crushing defeat in the battle of Al-Sarrif in 1901.

It was only natural, given Egypt's circumstances as an occupied country, that *Al-Ahram* would demonstrate particular interest in the conflict. Less than a month after the British-Kuwaiti agreement was signed, the front page headline for 9 May 1899 read: "Russia and England in the Persian Gulf!" Relying to a large extent on reports in the German press, notably the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the accompanying article reported on the problems encountered by the 14-member engineering team that the Russian government had sent to the area to conduct survey operations in preparation for laying a railway from Russia to the Gulf. Britain responded by dispatching a similar mission on board one of its battleships "in order to prevent the Russians from gaining a foothold in the Persian Gulf."

Tensions between the two powers appeared to subside for several months until, shortly into the following year, *Al-Ahram* cites a report, this time from a Russian newspaper, announcing that the British had stopped calling at the ports of the Gulf and that "the extension of Russian influence there indicates that the British no longer have supremacy over those countries."

It was not long before Kuwait became embroiled in an internal turmoil originally precipitated by the British-Russian rivalry over access to the Gulf. On 31 August, under the front-page headline "The Kuwaiti Question", *Al-Ahram* gives an account of the battle between Sheikh Al-Sabah of Kuwait and Abdel-Aziz Ben Al-Rashid, the "Emir of Jabal Shamar".

The battle, of course, constituted part of the larger contest between Great Britain's designs to secure its routes to India, and Istanbul's desires to keep its empire intact. While Al-Sabah enjoyed British protection under the treaty he had signed with Great Britain two years previously, Ibn Al-Rashid appealed to Istanbul, which also claimed sovereignty over this region. *Al-Ahram* relates that Ibn Al-Rashid "informed the Supreme Porte of his continued determination to fight Ibn Al-Sabah at the appropriate opportunity, although he would not venture to engage him in battle too near the shore for fear of the British warships. As a token of his favour, His Royal Highness the Sultan bestowed upon Al-Rashid a concubine with attendant eunuchs."

These circumstances must have been behind 'the Egyptian tourist's' decision to travel to the area. In the first report he dispatched from the area at the end of September he wrote, "During my journey in various quarters of the Arabian peninsula, I have learned much that should be of benefit to my nation and my people. It is my belief that the British are seeking to incite the Arab emirs against one another. Should they persist in these intrigues, the results will be grave indeed, for the British will profit whether they are victorious or defeated."

Several weeks later, on Wednesday 9 October, Bayoumi explains the motivation behind British machinations in the region: "If a bird flutters its wings on the route to India, the heart of the Foreign Office in London flutters into action. If the British could close off the waters of the Persian Gulf to all the fish of the sea or convert them to their spies they would not refrain from so doing." The lure of Kuwait to the British, he continues, is that "it is a city located at the northern end of the Gulf, south of Shatt Al-Arab. Nearby there is a beautiful anchorage site for its ships which makes it a perfect location for the final stop of the Baghdad railway, offering to the British a new communications route between the Mediterranean and the Gulf, or more specifically, between Europe and southern Asia."

As the tone of his letters implies, Bayoum siided with the position of *Al-Ahram*. Its pro-Ottoman sympathies with regard to the "Kuwaiti question" were in part due to the continued recognition that the Supreme Porte was still the legitimate sovereign over Egypt as well as Kuwait. It was also due in large part to Egypt's hostility towards the British occupation of Egypt and British colonial aspirations in other portions of the Arab World.

Bayoumi writes that in addition to attempting to ply the local rulers with money, the British also engaged spies to try to influence the people. The promises of arms were undoubtedly one of the commonest ways of buying influence among the populace. One *Al-Ahram* item, for example, reports that "certain merchants in the area have imported great quantities of arms with the blessings of the British, to the extent that all members of the tribes can be seen carrying a rifle."

Tensions were such that a confrontation between the British and Ottomans in the region seemed likely. According to Bayoumi there were more than 30,000 Ottoman soldiers stationed in Basra and nearby locations while the British had moved six of their battleships into the area. At the same time "Al-Rashid has amassed his troops on the outskirts of Kuwait. The victory he scored over Al-Sabah has made him bolder and more belligerent." That matters had reached this stage, he continues, was due in large part to the Ottoman imperial policies in the region. In order to keep the Arab countries "under the control of the Islamic caliphate" and "to protect them from falling into any European hands," the Ottomans "condoned the actions of Ibn Al-Rashid and encouraged the hostilities between Al-Saud and the emirs of Hayil and between the Sheikh of Kuwait and the emirs of the Najd so that they would remain divided and the Supreme Porte would remain the ultimate authority." The British had so deftly managed to turn the inter-tribal warfare to their advantage that "they have gained control over Bab Al-Mandab and Muscat and Oman and are now seeking to extend their control over Kuwait, the gateway to the Arab countries and the key to the Persian Gulf."

For their part, the British opened an agency in Kuwait to which they appointed "a consul who is familiar with the circumstances of these parts."

At the same time, the Ottomans turned their attention to the diplomatic front, appealing to the Council of Arbitration in The Hague on the grounds that, although they had sovereign rights over Kuwait and Sheikh Mubarak was their appointed ruler, "the British claim that Mubarak is independent, with German support, since it prefers an independent Kuwait so as to facilitate their access to the Baghdad railway."

Sometime around this juncture, Bayoumi returned to Egypt, where he wrote two additional articles. He informs his readers that in the wake of the defeat of the Kuwaiti governor in the battle of Al-Sarrif, the Ottoman authorities dismissed the governor of Basra for his negligence and instructed the governor of Baghdad to proceed with two regiments in order to occupy Kuwait. When Mubarak got wind of these plans, "he sent two telegrams to the government of India requesting them to send two warships. The government responded immediately. Thus, after having proceeded in an Ottoman ship, down the Tigris and reaching Fao, the pasha of Baghdad and his army discovered that they could advance no further due to the many British ships stationed off the coast of Kuwait."

It is interesting to pause for a moment to read Bayoumi's eye witness account of his journey to Kuwait. He writes: "I had boarded a British ship from the port of Bombay bound for Basra. I noticed that it was laden with telegraph and postal machinery as well as a number of crates with 'Mauser' written upon them, indicating that they contained the rifles of this famous brand name. I asked one of the Indians who was in charge of escorting this cargo and he told me that they belonged to the British and were destined for Kuwait. We continued on our voyage until we reached Muscat where I saw two British ships. I continued to see British ships as we proceeded northwards in the Gulf past Oman, Bahrain and Bushir... Among my companions on board was a famous merchant who was an acquaintance of Mubarak and I asked him to introduce me to the man."

Indeed, the meeting came about. As Bayoumi recounts, "Mubarak gave me a very cordial reception. During our discussion, I learned of his wrath at the Emir Abdel-Aziz Ben Al-Rashid, although he told me that he had no fear that the Ottoman soldiers would attack because he had signed a secret pact with the British in accordance with which he would permit them to build military fortifications mounted with machine guns which would serve to protect him if the Ottomans or Al-Rashid attempted to attack. He also permitted the British to establish a customs office and to construct a coal warehouse and to appoint a resident commissioner in Kuwait."

Eventually, an Ottoman delegation arrived in Kuwait to negotiate with Mubarak. Although the talks were cordial, the Kuwaiti ruler turned down the invitation to visit Istanbul. Their mission appeared more futile when they met the British commander, "who told them bluntly that Kuwait is independent and Great Britain shall protect this independence." After this meeting, the delegates warned Mubarak that "his scheme will expose him to the greatest perils," to which Mubarak's response was to "wake up early the following morning, take down the Ottoman flag and raise that flag which he so cherished." The Ottoman delegation departed immediately.

Having delivered such a slap in the face to the Supreme Porte, Sheikh Mubarak thought it wise to take further precautions. In addition to requesting more arms from the British government in India, *Al-Ahram* reports that "Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Sheikh of Kuwait, has appealed to Egypt in order to engage Egyptian officers to train his men in military manoeuvres. His request was turned down. However, he has met 400 men of the Qasim tribe who had come to Egypt with some camel merchants from the Najd. These men have agreed to join his army."

Having found that their threats to Sheikh Mubarak were to no avail, particularly given the presence of British naval forces, the Ottomans tried another tactic — flattery. According to a news item that *Al-Ahram* reported from the Turkish press, "The Supreme Porte has conferred the Golden Hijaz medal upon Sheikh Mubarak Ben Al-Sabah, the governor of Kuwait." Mubarak did not swallow the bait. For him to have accepted would have been to tacitly acknowledge his subservience to Istanbul.

The British, for their part, moved to resolve the situation both militarily and diplomatically. Successive *Al-Ahram* updates show the continued supply of arms to Mubarak's forces and their naval build-up. And on the diplomatic front, the British ambassador in Istanbul met with the sultan on 3 January for an explanation of the Ottoman delegation to Kuwait. Aware of his weaker military position and hoping that he could at least retain nominal suzerainty over Kuwait, the sultan suggested to the ambassador that the delegation had been acting independently.

With news reports of the movement of Russian and French warships to the region and the continued amassment of Ibn Al-Rashid's troops outside Kuwait, it appeared that the situation threatened to develop into a major international confrontation. It was at this juncture, however, that Abdel-Aziz Ben Saud, who at the time was living in Kuwait, launched his famous campaign that would bring him into Riyadh and shatter the forces of Ibn Rashid, the ruler of the Najd. The Ottomans, who could only yield to this fait accompli, concluded an agreement with the British that would maintain the status quo in Kuwait. According to the terms of the agreement, the Ottomans "recognised the independence of the Sheikh of Kuwait and permitted him to expand his territory." To the Supreme Porte, as well as to *Al-Ahram*, the treaty signalled a tragic end to Ottoman influence in the Gulf.

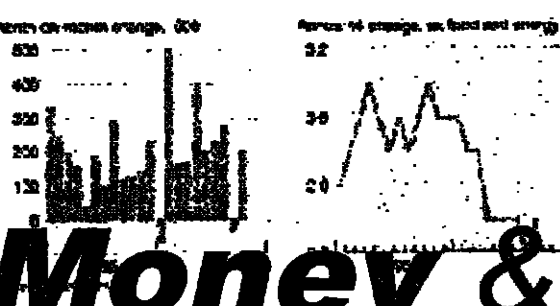
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Increase in Kuwaiti investments in Egypt

A GROUP of Kuwaiti investors confirmed that the recent amendments to the Egyptian investment law will provide incentive for investors in both Arab and foreign countries to invest in Egypt.

Abdel-Aziz El-Utaibi, former secretary-general of the Kuwaiti Ministerial Council and an investor, stated that despite the facilities provided by the new law, there are still demands from investors that a specialised office for solving the problems they face should be established.



Money & Business

Entertainment centre on the North Coast

A CONTRACT will be signed this month to establish the biggest recreational city on 17,000 square metres in the North Coast. Fatahella Fawzi, Mena Co chairman, said that the centre will include a theatre and restaurants, video game arcades, miniature golf, cafeterias, a bowling alley, and a 4,000 square metre park.

The centre is expected to open next summer.

Mena Co has acclaimed success with other related projects, such as Mena Villages in the North Coast and the Mena Shopping Centre in Alexandria.

AMAC: A leading role in Al-Ahram computer exhibition

FOR THE last four years, Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC) has had a leading role in rendering distinguished services for the exhibitors in the Al-Ahram Exhibition for Computer and Information Technology, which will take place this year from 27 February to 2 March at the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel. AMAC Centre has given the exhibitors statistics about the visitors, their distribution according to their residences, jobs, specialisation, and the reason of their visit. The accurate statistics were taken from the surveys distributed among the visitors during the exhibition. Accurately done by AMAC Centre, headed by Ali Ghoneim, general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment, those statistics enabled the exhibitors to plan their marketing policies.

AMAC Centre is keen to provide this unique service, the only one of its kind in the exhibition, to the distinguished companies in the field of computer, information technology, photocopying machines, and banking services. AMAC Centre has also made tremendous efforts to keep the exhibition an international one with specialised wings on information technology in order to contribute in spreading awareness on information technology and computer systems. The centre is therefore playing a leading role in promoting more progress in those fields to enter the 21st century.

It is worth noting that AMAC has a pavilion of its own in the exhibition to illustrate its fields of activities. The centre was founded in 1968 specialising in computers. The centre functions as a services centre for Al-Ahram Establishment and other governmental organisations, companies, and research centres. Since its foundation, the centre has gained expertis and modern equipment in its headquarters in the main building of Al-Ahram Establishment in Cairo, and at its branch in Alexandria.

Among the centre's activities:

— Rendering all kinds of computer services.

— Designing and analysing computer systems and their applications in: accounting and trade.

— Technical support for the customers in establishing and operating their own accounting centres, and training technicians.

— AMAC acts as a consultant for a variety of projects, selecting and assessing equipment, and providing systems solutions.

— Training teachers and organising computer courses.

— Executing major projects for the Computer Centre.

— Renting time-share computers for companies.

— Preparing, and recording statistics for companies that do not have the necessary means for major statistical reporting.

— Establishing databases.

— Acting as an agent in the computer field in agreement with IBM.

— Designing systems and programmes, and training on microcomputers.

— Electronic publishing.

— Designing, distributing and publishing educational and training programmes for computers.

Coca-Cola continuing its success

COCA-COLA has been called "the company which must be imitated" according to the well-known magazine *Far East Economic Studies*, in examining the company's economic figures.

This past year witnessed Coca-Cola Co increasing its median economic averages by 7 points this year.

The magazine indicated that Coca-Cola took second place out of 110 companies worldwide competing in South East Asia .

Worldwide competition in the Asian market has been intensive. In assessing its management, Coca-Cola ranked number two after Microsoft. Coca-Cola was also ranked number one out of 20 companies manufacturing carbonated beverages in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and Japan.

1996 was clearly a winning year for Coca-Cola, for it also was named best company for the second year according to *Fortune* magazine, in addition to winning an award for the fourth time for best carbonated beverage in China.

Aircraft requested

THE EXPORTERS Department of the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce requested financing to cover the cost of two cargo planes which would transport Egyptian exports to foreign markets. Having the planes would be a boon to increasing the country's export revenues, which presently fluctuate between US$40 to 50 million per year.

Osama Khayreddin, head of the Agriculture Committee of the department, explained that a committee was formed to determine means of financial support with regards to agricultural exports. Khayreddin indicated that exporters were not in need of direct support, rather they need to be provided with a means of shipping agricultural products at a competitive price that would help them to compete abroad. At present, agricultural exporters suffer from having to sell produce at high prices due to the costs of foreign air transport. The purchase of two planes would reduce dependency on foreign shipping space, and thus increase Egypt's agricultural markets worldwide.

All of this comes within the framework of the country's plan for developing exports, involving export guarantees and long-term contracts, which will allow more Egyptian products to enter the global market at competitive prices.

Business news

New Valley project provides 1 million jobs

EL-SAID Rashid, head of the General Federation for Labour Unions, stated that the New Valley project will help put an end to unemployment as it is expected to provide about 1 million job opportunities in many areas.

He added that because of the important role workers will play in the new project, a committee will be set up to organise their role.

No extra taxes

FAKHRI Saadeddin, head of the Taxation Department, confirmed that no extra taxes will be levied in the forthcoming period. He also noted that there are possibilities that the whole structure of taxation will be changed in a way that will reduce the current ratio of taxes.

Saadeddin added that the department is keen to solve all disputes that arise between the government and taxpayers.

New cement plant

SABRI El-Qadi, governor of Beni Suef, held a meeting with businessman Ahmed El-Swedi to discuss the steps that will be taken to speed the process of establishing a new cement factory in Beni Suef Governorate which will cost LE150 million and will be built on over 50 feddans. The new plant will start production after two years.

Menaced by pollution, indifference and haphazard planning, downtown Cairo is fast approaching extinction. In this issue, we continue



Above, Ataba Square at the beginning of the century — a busy carousel, but not yet the frenzied bustle of today; below, Midan El-Busta (Post Office Square), which faces Ataba

The khedive's dreams



On the eve of the twenty-first century, writes Fayza Hassan, Cairo has become a truly global megalopolis, successfully competing with the largest capitals in the world for the highest levels of pollution, overcrowdedness, traffic congestion — and indifference to the urban architectural heritage

After the founding of Fustat in 642, Egypt's centre of power moved several times, each new ruler abandoning the old city to build his own, creating new poles of attraction towards which his subjects converged. Al-Qahira, founded in 969, did not escape this fate. The city centre changed location, and new, fashionable quarters were created, while the old ones, neglected, slowly turned into slums. For the past thousand years, Cairo has been allowed to grow informally, spreading in all directions like a monstrous octopus gone mad. In the course of the city's history, a short period, less than a century, stands out during which an attempt at rational development was made. It fell short, however, of the aim contemplated. Soon after, other considerations, not the least of them an unprecedented growth in the Cairene population, made a mockery of this attempt.

"1863 is a landmark in the history of Cairo," writes André Raymond. This date corresponds to the beginning of Khedive Ismail's rule. For the first time since the city was established, nine centuries earlier, its growth was to be regulated according to an overall plan, by a ruler who fell in love with the concepts of urban development.

The decisions Ismail took at the time had as a direct and almost immediate consequence the creation of a "double" city. The "old" traditional one remained practically untouched, and a new "modern" one was planned and organised according to the principles of urbanism with which he had become acquainted during his trip to France.

Ismail wanted to rule a modern Egypt. Apart from the completion of the Suez Canal, which would give the country an unprecedented prestige, enlarging and beautifying Cairo was one of his most compelling desires. The city would become the symbol — indeed, the showcase — of the progress he had been able to achieve, to be admired and envied by visitors from all over the world attending the opening of the Canal. Improvements were to be started at once and in 1864 he created a coordinating organ for his urban policies, the Ministry of Public Works, soon to be headed by *Ali Mubarak*, a civil engineer and historian who had studied in France.

Works to introduce gas lighting were begun in 1865 by the Compagnie Lebon and included Cairo, Bulaq and Old Cairo. In 1867, Bab El-Hadid Station was illuminated for the first time to celebrate the beginning of regular train services. The area of Ezbekiya, the new quarter of Ismailiya, the avenues and palaces followed. By 1882, seventy kilometres of Cairene streets were illuminated by 2,500 lanterns shining in the night.

In May 1865, the French company Cordier was awarded the contract to provide running water to the city. A pumping station was established near Qasr El-Aini Hospital at the embouchement of the Khalig. During those years, work had also begun on the Ismailiya Canal, which would bring fresh water to the Suez Canal shipyards and at the same time allow for an expansion of the city to the northwest, between Qasr El-Nil, Bab El-Hadid and Abbassiya. That was just the beginning.

In 1867, Ismail travelled to Paris for the Exposition Universelle. When he saw what Haussmann had done for Paris, the khedive's ambitions for Cairo knew no limit. He met *Haussmann*, who in turn introduced him to Pierre Grant, an engineer of the Ponts et Chaussées who later headed Cairo's administration of thoroughfares. Ismail also met Barillet-Deschamps, the designer of the Bois de Boulogne, who was to plan the Ezbekiya Gardens.

But the khedive was on a tight schedule. The opening of the Canal was the date he had set for his triumph of urbanisation, and the date was approaching. The old city was bypassed and an intensive window-dressing operation was undertaken, hiding the ancient behind a facade of modern buildings that would achieve the desired effect.

In 1868, Ali Mubarak took up his functions as minister of public works. At once he set to work, drafting a project for a law (8 July 1868) which was never officially promulgated but which, had it been passed at the time, would have averted the urban disaster which befell Cairo in subsequent years. The law provided a rational framework for Ismail's urban enterprises.

The text of the law, lost for years, has been found and studied by historian and demographer Ghislaine Alleaume, deputy director of the Centre d'Etudes D'emographiques et Juridiques (CEDEJ). It aimed at reorganising the urban administration of the city and remapping its administrative divisions.

Following Cairo's natural and historic fragmentation, Mubarak divided it into four *aqsam* or districts which grouped Muhammed Ali's administrative divisions, the *athman* (eighths), two by two: Bab El-Sha'riya and Ezbekiya; Darb El-Ahmar and Gamaliya; Khalifa and Qusun; Abdin and Darb El-Gamamiz. The suburbs were also divided into four districts: Old Cairo, Bulaq, Shubra and El-Wayli. The last two became the site of the largest urban expansion outside the confines of the city proper. Each *qism* was to be controlled by an office of urban affairs headed by a district engineer in charge of supervising the buildings of his district in addition to sketching the relevant maps and generally making sure that the Tanzim — the regulations for the organisation of the city — was being applied.

The law made provisions for the district engineers to map out all the streets and alleys of their district, thereby allowing the Ministry of Public Works to control the alignment of buildings and plan for further expansions according to the size of the streets, the number of buildings already erected and the volume of daily traffic passing through these streets.

This programme was the necessary preamble to the elaboration of Grant's plan, which was to be implemented starting in 1874. It was equally necessary to the Tanzim in the planning of the new thoroughfares that would cross the city. Furthermore, the control of building standards was to be reinforced by increased surveillance of the guilds involved in construction work, with priorities clearly spelled out with respect to technique, construction safety standards, comfort and, finally, aesthetic effects. All building contracts were to be registered with the Ministry of Public Works, which was to become the sole authority in urban affairs, thus ensuring the city's harmonious growth according to a coherent master plan.

This plan was directly inspired by the "Haussmann recipe": a network of roads connecting a dozen squares (*mayadin*) with the Sikka El-Gedida (New Street), beginning in Ataba and reaching out to the east towards the desert.

Time was running out on the khedive, however, and so was money. The dream of a capital that would be touted as the Paris of the Orient had to be cut down to more realistic proportions with efforts limited to a zone yet undeveloped, to the north of the old city, situated between the roads to Bulaq, Bab El-Luq, Qasr El-Aini Street and the Nile's western bank. The quarter of Ismailiya was easily established, preparations to divide the land and sell it having been started by Ibrahim Pasha. Once the infrastructure was completed, Ismail offered the plots at low prices to whoever undertook to build houses and apartment blocs valued at LE2,000. Many members of the aristocracy had villas built in the area but, by the end of Ismail's reign, few apartment blocks had been completed.

The map of the area had been drawn, however, showing the future thoroughfares of Qasr El-Nil, Soleiman Pasha and Qasr El-Aini. Ministries were built not far from the Ismailiya Palace; Midan El-Ezbekiya, probably destined to become the city centre, at the crossroads between the old city and the new "European" quarter, had undergone a spectacular transformation. The whole area was landscaped into an English garden by Barillet-Deschamps. Ezbekiya became a replica of the Parc Monceau, complete with ponds, grottoes and bridges. Travellers' accounts abound in descriptions of ladies sailing on the lake and military orchestras entertaining a cosmopolitan public promenading around the shaded alleys.

The Opera House was completed at top speed on the model of La Scala de Milano, opening on 1 November 1869, in time for the Canal celebrations. To facilitate access to the Gezira Island, a metallic bridge was constructed by the French firm Fives Lille in 1869 — too late, however, for Eugenie to cross it on her way to the palace reserved for her on the island — while an English firm was awarded the contract to construct the Kubri El-Bahr El-Ama, or Blind Sea Bridge, also known as the English, Badia and finally El-Galaa Bridge. Barillet-Deschamps designed a large green area on the Gezira, which was to become, much later, the Gezira Sporting Club. He was also instrumental in the planting of trees along the road linking Giza to the Pyramids. In 1872, work was started on Clot Bey Street to link Bab El-Hadid Station to Ezbekiya, later to be extended to join Muhammad Ali Avenue up to the Citadel. In 1874, Abdin Palace was completed and in its surroundings a large number of administrations established their offices.

Looking back on Ismail's dreams of urbanisation, one is tempted to pinpoint only their shortcomings. His Paris of the Orient was little more than clever window dressing. To the old city he had brought only superficial changes (filling in and dividing up Birket El-Fil, transforming Midan El-Ezbekiya) but had not touched its physical structure in any useful way. Next to it he had created another city, an imitation of the European model, divorced from the traditional architectural style. Even its population was intrinsically different, marked by a massive foreign presence.

These two cities did not and would not come to blend into a coherent entity. Ismail had actively encouraged European architects to come and practice their profession in Cairo. Most of the known architects of the period were Italian, German, French and British. Buildings erected between 1863 and 1950 bore the names of Alfonso Manescalo and Mario Rossi, De Curel Del Rosso, Alexandre Marcel and V. Delander, Julius Frantz, Edwin Patsy and Ernest Jaspar, among others. They executed their works in the styles and trends prevalent in their countries.

Their European backgrounds were clearly reflected in the buildings they erected in Cairo. They had been taught the neo-classical, neo-Renaissance, neo-Baroque and Gothic revival styles. "They were quite familiar with the ideas of continuity and revival in architecture. Applying the comparable concept of reintroducing traditional architecture into Cairo they developed what may be called the neo-Islamic style," writes Tarek Sakr.

"In their attempt to build in this style they were faced with the lack of plan stereotype in the style of the older Cairene Islamic heritage for buildings with new functions," he adds. As a result, they had no choice but to apply Islamic decorative elements to their Western buildings "as a mere surface veneer."

A consequence of the European character of Ismail's "city" is the absence of mosques, comments historian Maged Farag. "The one mosque in khedival Cairo was Gami' El-Kekhya or, more correctly, Osman Katkhuda Mosque, which existed long before Ismail's urban drive; the only other was within the confines of the Ismailiya Palace."

Ismail, however, had simultaneously encouraged architectural and engineering training throughout his reign. In 1866 he founded the School of Irrigation and Architecture in Saray El-Zaafaran in Abbassiya to replace Muhammad Ali's Muhandiskhana. The school was relocated in Giza and in 1935 became the Faculty of Engineering of Fuad I (later Cairo) University.

In 1868 he reopened the School of Arts and Crafts for the training of qualified technicians. The school had been created by Muhammad Ali in 1839 but was closed in 1854. In 1937 it was given the status of high institute and became the nucleus of the Faculty of Engineering of Ibrahim University (1950), later Ain Shams University. Ismail's initiative was to pay off almost a century later when Egyptian architects came into their own: Sayed Karim (founder of the architectural magazine *Al-Emara*), Hassan El-Abd, Mohamed Refaat and Mustafa Fahmi are but a few of the Egyptian names which appear on some of the finest buildings of Cairo.

In his plans of urbanisation, however, Ismail dealt with a population which had only doubled since the end of Muhammad Ali's reign. Neither he nor his followers were prepared for what was to come. From 1882 to 1917 Cairo's population represented on average six per cent of the total Egyptian population. With the building of the Aswan Dam in 1902, relative prosperity kept rural migration towards the cities to a minimum.

Between 1897 and 1907, Cairo witnessed a heavy foreign influx and experienced a building boom similar to that instigated by Ismail. During these ten years the value of the cotton crop doubled, Europeans invested massively in Egyptian companies and the number of foreigners almost doubled. A strong demand for land sent prices skyrocketing. In 1908, 3,444 building permits were granted. New urban enterprises were set in motion, the last lakes filled, the hills levelled to allow for the construction of more buildings.

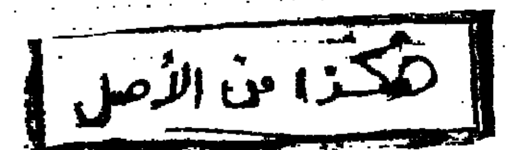
The old city was taxed to its maximum capacity. Gamaliya's population increased by 44,788 inhabitants between 1882 and 1927. In 1894 Baron Empain, with European financing, started work on a first tram line along the lines of Ismail's Cairo, which was later extended to include the outside suburbs.

Cairo's face was changing, but these changes were mainly concentrated in the European city. By 1914, however, agricultural production had slowed down, driving the population out of the countryside in search of jobs, mainly towards Cairo. By 1936 the rate of increase in population had reached the danger point. Within a few short years it was to get completely out of hand, irresistibly engulfing everything before it.

Sources:
André Raymond, *Le Caire*, Fayard, 1993
Tarek Sakr, *Early 20th Century Islamic Architecture in Cairo*, The American University in Cairo Press, 1993





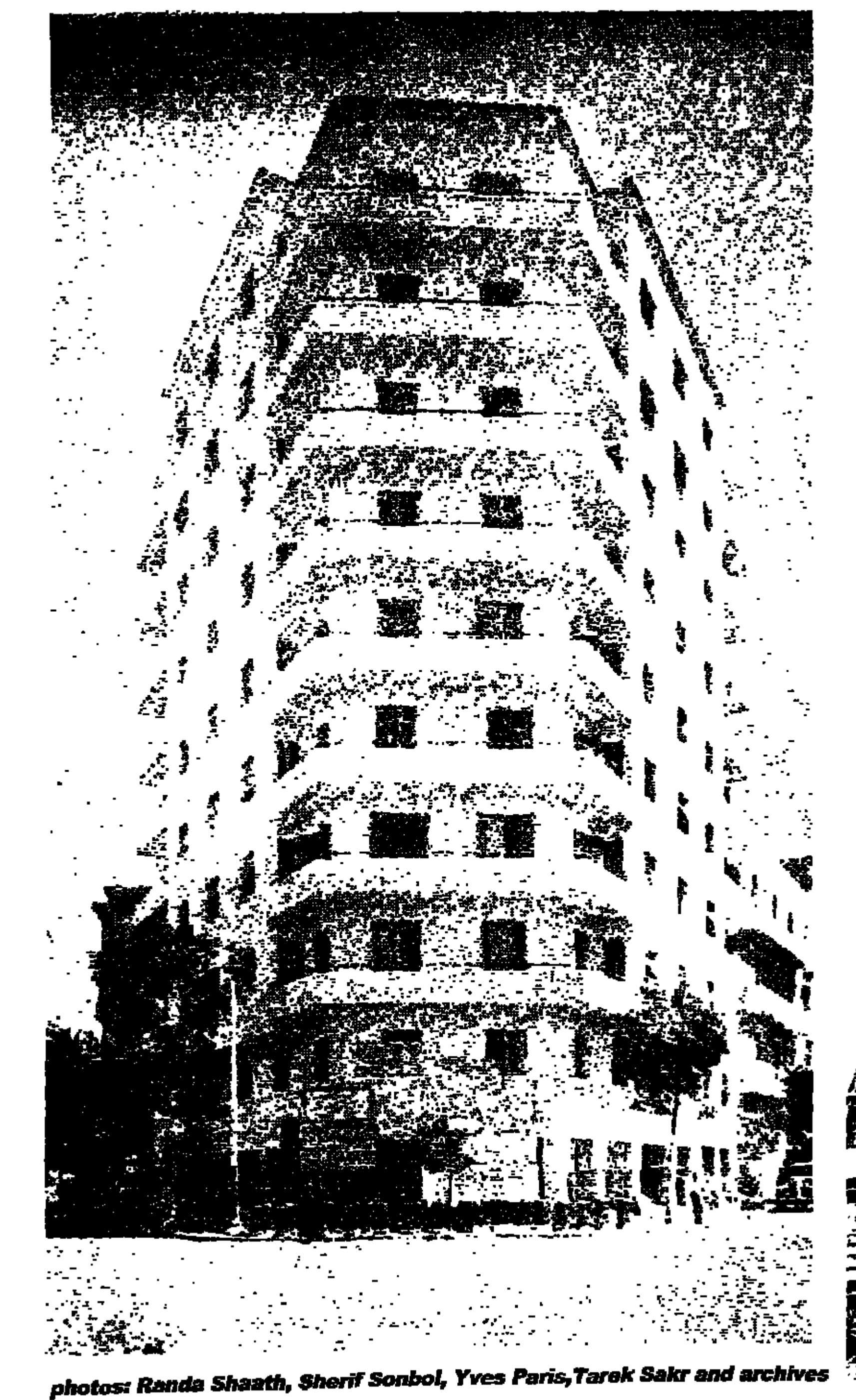


We continue the *Weekly*'s campaign to rescue the urban heritage, before it is too late. The task is daunting — but not impossible





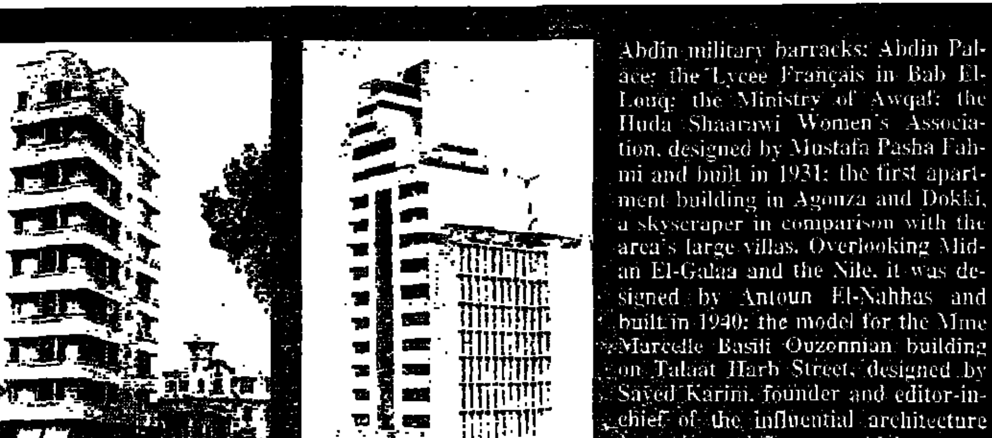
Clockwise from bottom left: On Champollion Street, the building belonging to journalist Emile Zaydan, former owner of Dar Al-Hilal; the neo-Pharaonic High Court of Justice, facing onto the downtown segment of 26 July Street (exterior); the High Court of Justice (interior); the Khedival Buildings on Emadeddin Street: an entrance half clogged with rubble from on-going constructions catering to Cairo's new consumers; below, Midan Talaat Harb, one of the hubs of "European Cairo", framed by downtown haunts including Groppi and several of the city's most frequented bookstores; an apartment building on Gomhouria Street, in the modified Mamluk style so characteristic of many turn-of-the-century dwellings, overlooks the urban wasteland that was once Shepherd's Hotel, and faces evidence of a late-twentieth-century obsession with bathroom fixtures; at the intersection of 26 July and Talaat Harb Streets, twin apartment blocks. The smooth, sweeping lines of the Art Deco wraparound balconies give the distinct impression that the buildings fit together like pieces of the urban puzzle, while curving, as if *in sympathy* with the alley connecting the two main thoroughfares







photos: Randa Shaath, Sherif Sonbol, Yves Paris, Tarek Sakr and archives



Abdin military barracks; Abdin Palace; the Lycee Français in Bab El-Louq; the Ministry of Awqaf; the Huda Shaarawi Women's Association, designed by Mustafa Pasha Fahmi and built in 1931; the first apartment building in Agouza and Dokki, a skyscraper in comparison with the area's large villas. Overlooking Midan El-Galaa and the Nile, it was designed by Antoun El-Nahhas and built in 1940; the model for the Mme Marcelle Basili Ouzonnian building on Talaat Harb Street, designed by Sayed Karim, founder and editor-in-chief of the influential architecture magazine *Al-Emara*, which spearheaded the mid-century enthusiasm for sleek, "modern" constructions

The wounded heart of Cairo

Fayza Hassan speaks with Galila El-Qadi, researcher in urban planning at ORSTOM (Office de Recherches Scientifiques et Techniques d'Outremer)

In the following months, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in collaboration with the Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt, will initiate a series of round-table discussions to find ways of preserving a number of buildings which have historical or architectural value. What in your view can be done about architectural preservation in Cairo?

So much damage has already been done that I wonder if you are not too late. Nevertheless, to be realistic, there are some practical steps that are essential, such as raising public awareness as to the significance of the national heritage. Because for a long time Egyptian property owners resorted to the system of the *awqaf* (pious endowments), caring, preserving and feeling responsible for a family building have not entered our traditions. People tend to view buildings as assets which they can sell if the price is right. This is how we have lost a large number of buildings which were really part of our heritage.

What sort of building would you consider part of our heritage?

Any building which has historical value, and here I am not talking about Pharaonic or Islamic Cairo's monuments, which are all invaluable. Rather, I am talking about buildings in which famous people have lived, or which are valuable from the architectural point of view, presenting unique features or belonging to a particular school. Ramses Street is a veritable "catalogue of architecture". It features prestigious buildings of a great stylistic variety including the neo-Pharaonic (the High Court of Justice), the neo-Moresque (The Music Institute, the headquarters of Islamic Youth Association and the Engineers' Syndicate) and neo-classical (the Association of Entomology, the Sadat Academy for Management Sciences — which, incidentally, has recently acquired a coat of bright paint — and the Ministry of Information).

What about the apartment buildings of the city centre?

All I can say is that they have had a rough time. The rent system has not helped things. Tenants are not interested in the preservation of the building in which they rent an apartment. They consider any effort to clean or restore anything outside the apartment which one occupies as suspicious. I have had all the trouble in the world getting the building where I live here cleared of the garbage which had accumulated on the roof, in the courtyard and on the service stairs. Most tenants did not have servants and therefore had no use for the stairs and they had never visited the roof. People should be taught about common property and that it should be kept in good condition. It is in their interest but many still don't understand. Schools should include such topics in their curricula.

Is it very different in France, for instance?

One should not forget that there was a time in France after the revolution when the people destroyed invaluable national treasures because in their eyes they simply symbolised the despised monarchy. After the second world war, they started learning how to care about the French heritage. The courtyards of the old buildings in particular are enchanting. But the French have been at it for the past fifty years now. Cleaning an old building is no mean task. And it is a job for professionals. It often takes them several years to clean a building. If the job is not carried out by professionals, more harm than good can result from such an enterprise. A building can be damaged by the wrong cleaning chemicals. But let us forget for a moment that many old buildings would benefit from a good cleaning job. What is much worse is the liberty that people take in painting the outside wall of their own apartment a different colour or decide to get new windows with perfect disregard to the overall effect it has on the block. This could never happen in other cities which have regulations forbidding citizens to differ from their neighbours. The fines are usually so stiff that it is a natural deterrent.

You have lived in Paris for a long time. Do you find Cairo changed?

A few years ago I decided to buy an apartment in the city centre because I thought that, with the development of the suburbs, a number of people who really loved Cairo would take up residence downtown and restore all the charming old apartments. This has happened in most capitals of the world. There is first a general exodus towards the suburbs considered chic and then people slowly return, because it is so convenient and because nowhere else does one find such large, comfortable apartments. Unfortunately this has not happened. People find the traffic appalling, the noise and the pollution unbearable. So I have little hope for the city centre. Unless people return to make their home here it will always be under threat of deteriorating even further.

The process takes years, sometimes generations. Many people consider the outer suburbs a more elegant address even though their apartments may not be as comfortable.

Unfortunately, we may not have that much time. We have also to consider that we are dealing with very large buildings. Restoring a villa is one thing, dealing with the huge blocks that line the streets downtown is another problem altogether. Many people will consider that it is less costly to build from scratch. What we need is a strong association with the power to spread awareness first and to organise smaller tenants and property owners' associations which would be in charge of building maintenance. There should also be a faculty at the university where the techniques of restoration are taught.

If you look at the task in its entirety, the job of returning the centre of Cairo to its past splendour is daunting. It will not be achieved in our lifetime.

Maybe not, but if one starts somewhere, say, limiting the task to one building at a time, and if one can contain the damage meanwhile, preventing tenants and shopowners from further destroying what is left, we will be on the right track. We can start something worthwhile which will be continued by the generations to come if we manage to imbue them with a sense of pride in their heritage, and an awareness of its importance.



One small step

For nearly one year, Netanyahu has succeeded in postponing what many would deem the inevitable — compliance with the Israeli troop re-deployment from Hebron and laying the framework for an Israeli pull-back from sizable portions of the West Bank. Finally, with the Oslo Accords and the future of the process hanging by a thread, an agreement was hammered out which hands over roughly 80 per cent of Hebron, the home of over 120,000 Palestinians, to the Palestinian Authority.

But even before Arafat and Netanyahu had finished shaking hands, staunch right-wingers in Israel have accused the prime minister of reneging on his campaign promises and being the first hard-liner to voluntarily hand over Jewish lands to Palestinians.

Others have lauded the agreement, arguing that Netanyahu's signature indicates a new pragmatic side to the Israeli premier not evidenced often in the past. Excessive back-patting at this time, however, may be premature. Still to be conducted are the final status negotiations which will place in the balance a host of thorny issues, on which Netanyahu has repeatedly proven to be an unwavering hard-liner in the best right-wing traditions.

Placed in perspective, the troop re-deployment, though an important step, will amount to little if the momentum of peace is not maintained. And this momentum, as has been noted time and time again, must be fueled by mutual trust and cooperation. In short, this means that, like it or not, Netanyahu must seriously entertain and embrace the idea of an independent Palestinian state. He, however, is leaning towards the establishment of a social enclave of sorts which is politically and economically dependent on Israel. And, this, to no one's surprise, except perhaps for the staunch Zionists, is not the basis for a just and comprehensive peace or, for that matter, even the peace with security banner under which Netanyahu ran his platform. At this time, more than ever before, a brand of real world pragmatism must prevail, not the kind of wavering and vacillation that Netanyahu would have try to fool the world into believing is strong leadership. A leader, in the end, does that which will ensure the security of his people — and this security comes only from making the necessary concessions to guarantee a lasting peace.

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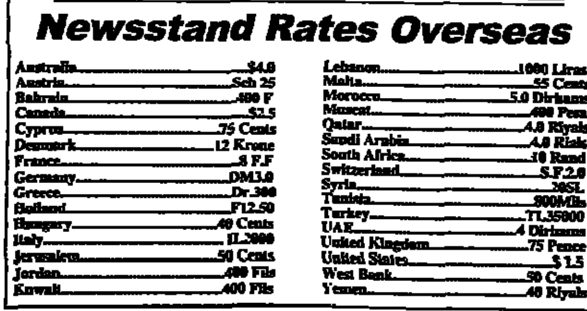
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Spanner in the works

Corruption is universal, writes **Ibrahim Shihata** in the first of two articles. But should it be tolerated?

Scholars and experts in many fields have long debated the nature and impact of corruption. What emerges from the literature is that corruption constitutes a highly complex set of interlocking economic, political, social, moral and historical phenomena. This suggests that we must avoid simplistic solutions and the narrow approaches advocated by any one social discipline; attempts to deal with corruption must, in my view, commence with analysis of local circumstances and how they affect values and behaviour, and hence the nature and level of corruption in a given country.

Some theorists have argued, or at least have implied, that corruption should be accepted as so deeply rooted in social norms as to be omnipresent; or, alternatively, as a "second-best" way of getting things done in a world that is far from perfect. My personal view, informed by years of experience with a number of development institutions, is that corruption in its varied manifestations has a negative impact on the society as a whole. Its distribution effects discriminate against the poor and the underprivileged. It increases the cost of development and, on a large scale, can retard its pace. It creates a law in practice different from the letter of the law. It allows special interests to prevail over the public interest and disrupts public confidence in government, leading over time to social and political tension.

Corruption in its broad sense is not confined to the public sector and, in that sector, is not confined to administrative bureaucracies. It is not limited to the payment and receipt of bribes. It takes various forms and is practiced under all forms of government, including well-established democracies. It can be found in the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government as well as in all private-sector activities. It is not associated with any ethnic, racial or religious identity. Yet its level, scope and impact vary greatly from one country to another and may also vary, at least for a while, within the same country. While corruption of some form or another may inhere in every human grouping, the system of governance has a great impact on its scope. Systems corrupt people, perhaps more than people corrupt systems.

Some cultures seem to be more tolerant than others when it comes to certain forms of corruption, particularly favouritism and petty bribes. In some countries, favouritism is so pervasive in human behaviour that those who, in the performance of their public functions, decline to favour friends and relatives are generally criticised as being unhelpful or unkind. Petty bribes are also seen in many countries as a form of charity, an advance incentive or expression of gratitude, or an acceptable substitute for the low pay of public officials — not the extortion it is recognised to be in other countries. Such cultural variations, though real, should not be taken as acceptable excuses for what is basically corrupt behaviour.

Since the end of the Cold War, both economic and political liberalisation have given rise to conditions that make corruption much less tolerable; we have arrived at an opportune moment to make a concerted effort towards its significant reduction. We must realise, however, that corruption is not the monopoly of heavily regulated systems. Loosely regulated systems with weak supervisory institutions also invite corruption and even organised crime. Periods of transition (from command to market economies and from closed to open societies) are particularly conducive to the spread of corruption, which thrives on the conflict of values, then soon distorts and destroys them.

In both theory and practice, many ways have been proposed to achieve the reduction of corruption. These, however, just amount to so many empty gestures unless there is real commitment from national leadership; a broad and sustained campaign by civil society to keep that commitment alive; institutional capacity to implement and enforce anti-corruption measures; transparency and a free flow of information; a social environment characterised by norms and values supportive of anti-corruption measures; the adoption by multinational corporations and international agencies of standards and practices which address corruption with a view to fighting it in their work; and cooperative efforts to deal with trans-boundary corrupt and fraudulent practices.

This reference to international agencies brings us to the World Bank. Is there a rationale for the Bank's concern with corruption as a general development issue, beyond the specific scope of a project financed by the Bank?

The World Bank is required by its Articles of Agreement to ensure that the proceeds of its loans will be used only for the purposes for which they are granted, and to disburse these loans only when expenditures on the projects it finances are actually being incurred. It is also required by these articles to finance such expenditures "with due attention to considerations of economy and efficiency, and without regard to political or other non-economic influences or considerations." The Articles of Agreement do not specifically include "curbing corruption" among the Bank's purposes or functions. They generally prohibit the Bank from taking non-economic considerations into account in its decisions and from interfering in the political affairs of its members. For this reason, the Bank has traditionally been explicitly active in ensuring that procurement under its own loans is carried out in a transparent manner and on a competitive basis but has avoided, until very recently, any full-fledged attempt to adopt an anti-corruption strategy. Since the early 1990s, however, the Bank has identified corruption as an issue to be taken into account in its work on governance and, in a few cases, has begun to raise the issue in its country dialogues. It has also sought to assist borrowing countries in introducing economic, administrative, legal and judicial reforms through a series of structural and sectoral adjustment loans, technical assistance loans and grants, and sectoral investment loans. While the Bank was not in this way directly involved in fighting corruption, it was aware that these reforms have a direct positive effect, not only on the growth prospects of the borrowing countries, but also on the level of corruption.

The Bank's explicit concern with corruption as a general development issue was highlighted by its president, James D Wolfensohn, in his first speech before the annual meeting of the board of governors in September 1995. He then asked me to review all proposals and consider initiatives for possible actions by the Bank. Detailed discussion of such proposals and initiatives at the senior management level led to specific action which has been approved by the president and, as needed, by the board of executive directors. Such action covers a number of different fronts, all related to measures deemed to be within the Bank's competence. In the meantime, a comprehensive strategy to address corruption, both as an issue of the Bank's own effectiveness and more generally as a development policy issue, is being prepared for consideration by the board in early 1997.

The writer is senior vice-president and general council of the World Bank.

A coalition government in Israel?

Following the breakthrough on Hebron, the emergence of a coalition government between Likud and Labour cannot be excluded. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the significance of such a development

Various signs seem to indicate that Israel's Labour Party is seriously considering the possibility of giving up its opposition to Netanyahu and accepting the status of junior partner in a coalition government under the leadership of Likud, especially now that the agreement on Hebron has finally been initialled. One such sign was the statement made by Israel's last Labour foreign minister, Yehud Barak, who declared during an interview with Israeli television a few days ago that he did not oppose re-negotiating the Oslo Agreements signed between the Israelis and Palestinians under Rabin. Coming as it does from the most likely successor of current Labour Party leader, Shimon Peres, this dramatic statement will certainly be read as reflecting more than General Barak's personal opinion.

Labour's strongest argument against Netanyahu is that he has reneged on commitments assumed by the state of Israel under its former government, in open violation of its international obligations. Barak's statement can be interpreted as an informal message to Netanyahu that the Labour Party is ready to abandon its all-out opposition to Likud and seek a middle ground position, possibly in preparation for a coalition government that would include Labour.

Another, even more significant, sign, is that discreet negotiations are currently underway between Yossi Beilin, the main architect of the Oslo Accords and Peres' right-hand man in the peace negotiations, and Michael Eitan, head of the Likud bloc in the Knesset and one of Netanyahu's close associates, in an attempt to hammer out a common position on the final Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Should this endeavour succeed, it would defeat Arab attempts to drive a wedge between contending Israeli players in the negotiation process.

Usually regarded as a prominent dove who is ready to take risks for the sake of peace, Beilin is now revealing another facet of his political persona, with his readiness to compromise with Likud at the expense of consistency in his political line. According to what has been revealed so far, the common Beilin-Eitan project involves a tradeoff in which Likud will accept the principle of the existence of a demilitarised 'Palestinian entity' not enjoying sovereign prerogatives, in exchange for Labour's accepting that the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza remain under Israeli sovereignty. As to the settlements built around Jerusalem and close to the Green Line separating Israel from the West Bank, these will be annexed to Israel. This will also apply to isolated Jewish communities anywhere inside the Palestinian entity.

The two parties are not expected to reach final agreement on all issues of contention between them, notably on whether the 'Palestinian entity' should be described as a 'state' even if it is deprived of any sovereign prerogatives and on what quota of Palestinian refugees should be granted the right of return (the term 'refugees' in this context refers only to those of 1967, while 'return' is limited to the Palestinian entity only regardless of a refugee's place of birth).

Actually the Beilin-Eitan dialogue is a test of how far the two parties can agree on a practical strategy which would constitute a basis for a coalition government. It seems that both Barak on the right of the Labour Party and Beilin on its left agree on the need for such a government in which, despite their status as junior partners, they would wield some clout thanks to the fact that the rebellion in Netanyahu's ranks against the Hebron agreement makes him dependent on Labour's support in the Knesset to have the agreement pass.

Netanyahu has taken advantage of Labour's new conciliatory line to adopt an even more hawkish stand. According to the Israeli daily *Maariv*, he is now insisting that the PLO enact a new charter explicitly recognising Israel's right to exist and that the Palestinian Authority hand over to Israel's jurisdiction Palestinians in the self-rule areas accused of committing terrorist acts against Israelis. Worse, Netanyahu decided to delay the final Israeli pullout from the West Bank and Gaza from September 1997 to January 1999 on the grounds that it is only in the final stage of the negotiations that a decision will be taken on whether a total pullout from these territories will be included in the final peace settlement. Initially totally opposed to this new condition, Arafat realised that if he wanted to see the Hebron agreement signed he had to accept the compromise position proposed by King Hussein and guaranteed by Washington to delay the final pullout to mid-1998.

The Labour Party seems to have finally endorsed Netanyahu's line that security must take precedence over peace. When Labour came to power in the wake of the Madrid conference, it managed to convince the Arab parties that it was ready to assume a certain amount of security risks in the name of peace, but Peres abandoned that stand on the eve of the Israeli elections, as demonstrated by his disastrous involvement in Lebanon and the ensuing Qana tragedy. Now Labour is trying to reach a compromise position with Netanyahu based on placing security before peace, banking on Netanyahu's need for Labour's support against the rebellion within his own ranks. This raises the question of where the Arab parties stand with respect to this new political alliance in Israel which is neither ready, willing nor able to deliver a peace deal compatible with minimal Arab demands.

Ramadan remembered

By Naguib Mahfouz

For me Ramadan is a month of worship and contemplation. Fasting allows for a curious tranquility and clarity of mind. When I read, whatever the subject — Sufism, religion, literature or philosophy — the words on the page seem to echo with a far greater resonance. This is why, for me, Ramadan has always been a month for nourishing both the mind and the soul.

I first started to fast just before my seventh birthday. I found it very difficult at first, yet, in spite of the physical hardship of fasting, I discovered that it gave me great spiritual satisfaction.

Among my fondest recollections of Ramadan are the visits we would always make to the homes of various prominent families in our neighborhood. These families hosted recitations of Sufi poems in commemoration of the Prophet and every large household had their own reciters and chanters. Their doors would always be open to anyone who wanted to listen, and people would congregate there. This, of course, was before the introduction of radios and loudspeakers. And my favorite moment was when sunset approached and all the sheikhs stopped their recitations to go out and sound the call to prayer.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Exit from the valley

Al-Ahram: "It is rare for a person to find himself a witness to living history. At such rare moments, one is deeply moved by feelings of awe and hope for a future abounding with change. This was the case when Egyptians saw giant diggers, at President Mubarak's signal, start digging the Sheikh Zayed Canal to create a new geographic reality in the Western Desert, carrying prosperity and marking the beginning of a great exit from the narrow valley that we have known."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 10 January)

Al-Arabi: "The debate about the New Valley project will continue — it must. A project of this size and great effect on people's lives and the nation's future is bound to raise questions and different viewpoints. We must learn to respect these differences. The important thing is to know when and how to differ and where the limits to our differences are. More important is to realise the extent of agreement and expand it, for it is that which will eventually define our national perspective on this and other projects."
(Galal Aref, 13 January)

Al-Akhbar: "Representatives of the Egyptian nation gathered at the Toshki site to join President Mubarak in launching the grand national project which will take us from the old valley (which represents four per cent of Egypt's land) to a new valley (which is 25 per cent of Egypt's land). This is proof that the president is keen to guarantee the future of coming generations and help them overcome overcrowding."
(Galal Dwidar, 12 January)

Al-Wafd: "I listened to Prime Minister Ganzouri's explanation of the project to develop southern Egypt. With all due respect, I am now more than ever unconvinced of its feasibility. All the questions raised by top experts in agriculture and irrigation remain unanswered. What Ganzouri did not say was that research does not support this project on economic and technical grounds. The government's decision to go ahead with this project is purely a political one. The government could still rethink it and look into its economic feasibility. Where is the financing going to come from? And why should investors move southwards?"
(Magdi Mehannah, 11 January)

Al-Mussawar: "Every time something new comes into our lives, or we hope to establish a great project, we are confronted with criticism and sometimes ruthless attacks. Some criticise because they have grown used to the old ways and are afraid of any change. Others, lacking in knowledge, criticise just for the sake of it or in search of fame. This has always been the case and in the future, when the project ends, there will be more. Maybe then we will find people demanding the conversion of the land that was reclaimed into living areas and the filling in of the canals. After all weren't they the same people who previously demanded that we should take down the High Dam?"
(Abdel Qader Shoheib, 10 January)

Al-Shaab: "Civilisations are not born from a legislative or executive decision, but through a complex interaction of values and inherited traditions, climate and geography and communication with neighbouring regions and societies. It is, therefore, not correct to say that the new Nile Valley project will create a new civilisation through expanding the agricultural area in Egypt."
(Mohamed Helmi Mourad, 7 January)

October: "We are preparing for the advent of the new century by launching the greatest project Egypt has known since ancient times. It is not just a project to improve what already exists, but one which will create a new valley and a new society — a new nation for the ever-increasing Egyptians whose old valley has become too small."
(Mahmoud Abdel-Moneim Murad, 12 January)

Akhbar El-Yom: "From the moment the decision to launch the 21st-century project to develop southern Egypt was announced, people have cast doubt on it. This is not strange, as we have a body of 'experts' who criticise everything without having the least idea of what they are criticising. The High Dam is one example which has had its share of criticism. There are those that still claim that all the disasters that have hit Egypt are due to the High Dam!"
(Ibrahim Saada, 11 January)

Rose El-Youssef: "We should explain to our children that the event which took place on Thursday, 9 January 1997, is the dream which will unite the people and provide thousands of work opportunities. This giant project is the fulfilment of a dream and an aspiration for a better life — a blow against terrorism and extremism and one of the fruits of peace."
(Mahmoud El-Tohami, 12 January)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Osama Anwar Okasha's is the face of Ramadan television. How to portray the face of a character who has created so many memorable characters? Well, I gave him the face of an *ibn balad*, his nose I made from *qataif*, his hair to resemble *kunafa*. His dramas keep millions of viewers glued to their TV throughout the Holy Month. Will this year's serial surpass his previous scripts? That is the question mark that forms his brows.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Curtain call

For three long months, the strangest and most absurd international theatrical production ever has been on stage. The piece is called the Hebron Agreement. The scene which dominates the play is a negotiating table; the cast, sitting around the table, are acting out the roles of Arab and Israeli delegates. The audience listens as the actors shout and shake their fists; from time to time explosions fill the air. Netanyahu throws a switch, and the lights go off. Then the US mediator appears, waves his magic wand, and the stage is once again flooded in light. At every performance, the US mediator assures the audience that the happy ending is imminent and that agreement has almost been reached. Only a few minor matters need to be retouched; once these insignificant details are settled, the actors will emerge for the curtain call.

What Americans and Israelis call minor matters and insignificant details constitute the very foundations of the Oslo Accord and the peace process, from its inception to the present. The idea was that Israel would withdraw from the West Bank in several consecutive phases; 85 per cent of occupied land was to be evacuated by September 1997. With that much accomplished, the final phase of the negotiations would deal with more substantial and complex issues: the status of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements and the refugees. The Hebron Agreement, therefore, is only a minor part of the peace settlement, and the Palestinians were wrong to have acceded to Peres' wish, taken into consideration the Israeli elections, and accepted the postponement of its conclusion.

By procrastinating on the implementation of the Hebron agreement, citing as pretexts military and security arrangements, Netanyahu wished to shelve the remaining phases of withdrawal from the occupied West Bank, reconsider the agreements already signed between Israel and the Palestinians, and postpone withdrawal from the remaining Arab lands until 1999, on the grounds that the majority of his cabinet and the religious parties forming the coalition were opposed to the agreements already signed. In other words, the Palestinians were expected to accept any crumbs they could get from the Hebron Agreement and in return give up on the other terms of the Oslo Accord.

In this grim play, the US has played the strangest role of all. While the US has signed and guaranteed the implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement, Dennis Ross, the US mediator, has been trying to persuade Arafat to accept Israel's demands that the conclusion of the agreement be stalled or postponed. Ross drew on all his negotiating skills to get Arafat to accept what Netanyahu wants, precisely to postpone the phases of withdrawal from the West Bank. With that much revealed, who can believe any Israeli pledge or US guarantee?

Only moments before the curtain falls on these absurd negotiations (and despite Mubarak's relentless efforts to get Israel to adopt a more flexible attitude, and his repeated warnings as to the destructive effects of Israel's intransigence on the peace process), the situation remains largely ambiguous, giving rise to conflicting expectations. Although the most recent developments induced by the good offices of King Hussein of Jordan and Egypt's proposal for a compromise setting mid-1998 as the date for full withdrawal from the West Bank, could result in a US-endorsed agreement and new guarantees, given the brief history of experience with Netanyahu's government, such an agreement would not necessarily constitute the final word. Israel has previously dishonoured its commitments and, by delaying its withdrawal from the occupied territory for a full year, has succeeded in achieving new gains. What would prevent Israel from dishonouring its commitments again and again, banking on the support of the US? What if Israel finds itself dealing with a more lenient and compromising Arab front than the one it faced in the past?

Israel's credibility in the peace process has totally collapsed. Furthermore, while Arab governments may continue to assert their trust in the US's role in the peace process, the position which the US has adopted so far, and its readiness to re-negotiate the terms of agreements already signed, are hardly conducive to optimism regarding the future of the peace process under the current Clinton-Netanyahu administration.



Soapbox

Redrawing lines of conflict

The successful occupation by opposition forces of a massive stretch of territory that includes Kurmuk and other cities near the southern Blue Nile means that events in Sudan have entered a new phase. And it makes little difference whether these forces belong to the Sudan People's Liberation Army or to other opposition groups since all the military forces that operate under the National Democratic Alliance fall under the leadership of John Garang.

Opposition forces now control several thousand kilometres of central eastern Sudan, near the Ethiopian borders, rather than being restricted to the Eritrean borders as was the case for nearly a year. Consequently the Sudanese regime is now threatened along a broad front that extends from Port Sudan in the north to the south-eastern borders of Sudan. Opposition forces are now in a position to advance toward Damazin, a large city and the base of the government force charged with protecting the Roseiries Dam, vital to Sudanese irrigation and electricity production.

But rather than advancing on Damazin, the opposition forces have a second option. They could easily choose to entrench themselves in their current positions and wage a war of attrition in an attempt to exhaust government forces and open new breaches in the government's lines of defence.

The territory that now serves as the base for opposition operations includes mountain ranges, tropical forests, savannah and desert, terrains that favour the activities of opposition guerrilla groups rather than the standing army of the government.

It is difficult to project a scenario of how the current balance of forces will play itself out. What is certain is that this new phase spells the beginning of the end of the current Sudanese regime.



Mahgoub Osman

This week's Soapbox speaker is a former Sudanese minister of national guidance.

Dangerous dissembling

The night of the Hebron agreement was shrouded in smoke. **Mohamed Sobeih** peered into the fog

In the past states have resorted to exporting their domestic problems beyond their borders by concocting a cause to wage a war, or creating a crisis with their neighbours, thereby diverting the attention of their people from domestic issues.

This is exactly what the Israeli government is trying to do. It is trying to export its problems because it is incapable of finding a way out of honouring its commitments under the Oslo Accords. A number of hardliners — some of them ministers — opposed to the implementation of the accords, including Eitan and Sharon, have no complusion against publicly calling on the government to renege on all its commitments. As a result, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu faces a divided cabinet and a Knesset that is split between supporters and opponents of the peace agreements.

The picture is further complicated for Israel's prime minister by growing demands — from Palestinians, Arabs and the international community — that the peace accords be implemented in an equitable manner which does justice to both the spirit and letter of the agreements.

In an attempt to escape this dilemma, Netanyahu is accusing Arafat of obstructing the negotiations and hindering the implementation of the peace agreements concluded between the former Israeli government and the Palestinians.

Strangely, Netanyahu appears unaware that it is the Israelis who are occupying Palestinian land, and it is he who refuses to open Shuhadaa Street or the vegetable market.

He is opposed to an official Palestinian presence inside the Ibrahimi mosque though he knows that there are 160,000 Palestinian residents in the city of Hebron as against 400 Jewish settlers, and that the Palestinians should have access to the holy shrine without the risk of being massacred at the hands of some deranged Israeli extremist.

When Netanyahu agreed after months of negotiations to open Shuhada Street over several phases, he asked for space to be allocated for the parking of settlers' cars. Yet when Arafat urges Israel to implement the agreements it has already signed he is accused of impeding the progress of the negotiations, and of not being truly desirous of peace — or at least an Israeli-fashioned peace.

Israeli accusations that Egypt is inciting the Palestinians against concluding a deal on Hebron is but another example of Tel Aviv's attempts to cloud the real issues. Egypt, after all, wishes to see a real and comprehensive peace, and is certainly not interested one iota in a fragile truce that would please extremists.

The dissembling that has come to constitute official Israeli policy may well, in the near future, come to include threats of war as Israel attempts to up the ante in its desire to divert attention from its failure to implement the nuts and bolts of Oslo on the ground.

In fact there is no reason why the protocol for withdrawal from Hebron should not be signed soon. Certainly there has been no lessoning of the Herculean efforts, to which Egypt has made a substantial contribition, directed at overcoming Israeli obstacles. But there remains always the insistent question: Will Israel use similar ploys in the final status negotiations?

The Israeli prime minister speaks about Jerusalem as a "Jewish city" and as the "city of the Jews". He has earmarked funds for the construction of settlements in the very heart of its Arab section in Bab Al-Amoud. He opened the underground passage underneath the Aqsa Mosque in the hope that the mosque would crumble. He precipitated a horrific massacre and failed to heed the warnings of advisors. He is employing inhuman means that violate the most basic human rights to expel the Arab population of Jerusalem. And now he has gone even further, displaying models of the city which do not include the Aqsa Mosque or other holy Islamic sites.

Netanyahu speaks about bringing in more settlers, and provides funds for this purpose. He rejects the right of refugees to return to their homes. He wants the Palestinians to draw up a national charter which suits him whereas, to this day, Israel lacks a constitution simply because it is unwilling to define its borders lest such a definition limit its ability to expand into Arab territory.

The Hebron agreement may be signed and the Palestinians may receive a list of American guarantees contrary to the wishes of Netanyahu. What Palestinians do hope for this time, however, is a better list of American guarantees, particularly regarding Jerusalem.

Once again we ask Netanyahu if he is reverting to his old political game to evade the implementation of the Hebron agreement after extending the deadline of the Israeli army's final withrawal from the West Bank beyond the date allowed under the previous agreements. Certainly the repercussions of such a game are likely to be grave, especially if fanatic settlers decide to take matters in their own hands.

The writer is the permanent Palestinian representative at the Arab League.

Only Israeli lives count under Oslo

"Crazed", Palestinian-shooting gunmen lie at the very heart of a peace process whose guiding principle is Israeli security alone, writes **Tikva Honig-Parnass**. The outcome? A Palestinian Bantustan — and a policy of legitimised murder

The shooting by an Israeli soldier in the Hebron market, which wounded six Palestinians, was not the deviant act of an emotionally disturbed young man, as the right-wing establishment and the Israeli military authorities have tried to make out. The nationalist-religious camp, the settlement movement and the *yeshivolh* (religious seminaries) which they sponsor serve as factories for the production of such murderers. The messianic outlook of this movement, with its fanatical beliefs about the 'holiness of the land', provide legitimacy for the murder of Arabs. Moreover, representatives of this camp are part of the present governing coalition — including at cabinet level — and followers of this fascistic, clericalist ideology have long been found among the officers and soldiers serving in the Occupied Territories. Many are themselves settlers.

However, the general cavalier attitude of all Israeli governments, whether led by Labour or Likud, towards the lives and safety of Palestinians (as opposed to their deep concern for Israeli security) is as much to blame (albeit in an indirect fashion) for the violent attacks on Palestinians as are the extremist ideologists and "educators".

This attitude is fully expressed in the Oslo Accords, which served to preserve Israeli security alone — with the help of the Palestinian leadership. It penetrated into each successive stage of implementation, all of which completely neglected the security of Palestinians, and left them more vulnerable than ever.

According to the Oslo Accords, Israel remains responsible for the security of Israeli citizens in every inch of the Occupied Territories, and is permitted to enter the Palestinian Authority's areas in pursuance of this end. But not vice-versa. This approach, which holds that only the Israelis have a security problem, is used by Israel as a negotiating device (including in Hebron negotiations) in order to extort additional Palestinian concessions with regard to continued Israeli control over the territories that are to be signed over to the PA.

Collective punishments like curfews and closures, which are imposed on the Palestinians whenever soldiers or settlers murder them — are the principal means of pressure used against them.

The total neglect of Palestinians' safety is reflected in the work of the Israeli security service, the Shabak, which is known for its efficiency and professionalism: the Israeli press reported that the Shabak had warned about a military action by Hamas that was supposed to have taken place on the same day as the soldier opened fire in Hebron, but "the possibility that a settler or religious extremist might attack Arabs never even occurred to them."

The welcome proficiency of another soldier, who fortunately was able to overpower the assailant before he inflicted more harm, was not in evidence when more than 1,500 stone throwers and demonstrators were shot to death by Israeli troops in the period from the outbreak of the Intifada until today. It was purely accidental that, this time, a massacre of Palestinians was averted. Everyone agrees that it will be exceedingly difficult to prevent such a massacre in the future, not only in Hebron but throughout the entire Occupied Territories.

The 300 Jewish settlers in the heart of Hebron are indeed a fuse that could be easily lit, setting off an explosion huge enough to have deep implications for the Oslo process.

However, the plan for the final settlement reflected in the Beilin-Abu Mazen Agreement, which allows most of the settlers in the Occupied Territories to remain where they are, threatens to continue the utter neglect of Palestinian security, and to destroy any chances for the "peaceful co-existence" promised by the followers of Oslo.

Netanyahu's interest in removing all obstacles to the realisation of this Bantustanisation plan is what has prevented the signing of the Hebron agreement up till now. In other words, Israel is insistent that it will not comply with the schedule for the next stages of the redeployment of the Israeli army in the West Bank, which according to the interim agreements is supposed to be completed by September 1997.

In particular, the Israelis are not interested in completing the redeployments before the final status talks begin. They are afraid of creating 'facts on the ground' which will prevent the total lack of continuity between the "Swiss cheese holes" (in the words of Ariel Sharon) of Palestinian areas in the West Bank, each surrounded by settlements, and between these and the Gaza Strip. Israel insists that any large-scale redeployment must take place in the context of the decisions of the final status negotiations, since these redeployments will delineate the borders between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The American letter of commitment, which will be attached to the Hebron agreement is meant to ensure Israeli interests in an exceedingly sophisticated manner: further Israeli redeployments are to be made conditional on Arafat committing himself to carrying out measures which would constitute a kind of political suicide on his part. These include agreeing to extradite Israeli Palestinians involved in military operations against Israelis, and to dismantle the ideological, civil and military infrastructure of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad organisations.

In order to encourage Arafat to agree to this, Netanyahu has recently begun to drop hints concerning his position with regard to the final settlement, which turns out to be very similar to the Beilin-Abu Mazen Agreement. Moreover, the supporters of this plan within the Likud and the other right-wing parties, including the National Religious Party, have recently even declared that they are prepared to agree that the future Palestinian entity possess some symbols of independent statehood.

On both the Zionist right and left today, one finds many who are fond of repeating, with a cynical wink, the phrase: "There are all kinds of states." What they are talking about is a Palestinian Bantustan.

This broad, joint consensus, which many in the international community misinterpret as a recognition of the national rights of the Palestinians to an independent state, could serve as the basis for a national unity government. Of late, voices calling for the establishment of such a government have been growing stronger among both the right and the Labour Party. Netanyahu needs the support of the Labour Party in order to implement the Bantustanisation plan, which is still 'too much' for the far right.

The writer is director of the Jerusalem-based Alternative Information Centre. The above article was translated from the Hebrew by Yochanan Lorwin.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

The truth of Hebron

Hebron reveals to Israel the truth about itself, and to everyone the truth about the peace process. This, it seems to me, is the one aspect of the Hebron deal that has received little or no comment, at a time when the public is surfeited with endless reports of "deal delayed", "deal at hand", "Israelis and Palestinians exchange accusations of responsibility for delay", etc.

This is not surprising. The ingenuity of the discourse of the peace process has lain from the start in its ability to marginalise the real issues — the questions of rights and morality, of who is oppressing whom and who is usurping whose land, water, homes, livelihood, and often, life — indeed, to mask them under a blare of incessant chatter: negotiations progress, negotiations stalled, deadlocks reached and deadlocks broken.

The process, the negotiations, as Edward Said has noted on many occasions, becomes all there is, while moral judgement is reserved for the alleged roles the parties play in stalling the process, or keeping it going, irrespective of where it is leading to, or of whether its results are at all desirable from a perspective of rights and morality.

Not that the discourse of the peace process is amoral — an openly cynical recognition of the realities of power, in which the conquered are told simply to 'like it or lump it'. If anything, its high-sounding moral pretensions, as I have noted in this space before, are unequalled by any other international conflict since World War II: two sets of Nobel peace prizes; several White House ceremonies; proclamations of great days for peace, all for a conflict that is yet to be resolved, even formally.

It is of course a skewed morality whose sub-text is flagrantly racist: Israelis, or rather the Jews of Israel and any other country who have a mind to come to Palestine, are imbued with rights that are far superior to those of the Palestinians and Arabs who have lived in this land for generations. Ultimately, the cynicism of brute force is omnipresent, albeit in a non-immediate and complex form. When the advocates of the peace process tire of their critics, their final, and indeed most powerful argument, has been and remains: "what other alternative is there?" — which, read in a straightforward manner, is exactly equal to being told to "lump it".

And lump it was exactly what the Palestinians and their Arab brethren did yesterday, when Netanyahu and Arafat initialled their first deal since the Likudnik premier came to power over six months ago, providing the Western media with the opportunity to swing back into upbeat (great day for peace) mood, and giving some 300, mostly American, hoodlums, with a mass murderer for a hero, rights to a city of 160,000 Palestinians.

Hebron, however, is Israel epitomised — Israel laid bare, with all the ideological trappings removed. One has only to imagine the founding of the state of Israel without benefit of the holocaust, the Kibbutzim, the land-without-a-people-and-snake-infested-swamps-turned-into-green-pastures myth, without the marginalised Jew-turned-into-citizen/labourer/fighter, without the phantasmagoric menace of Muslim Arab hordes driving that same citizen/labourer/fighter and embodiment of Western Man into the sea. Imagine Israel without all the trappings, and you get Hebron.

Everything else is there: from reference to religious myth (the graves of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jews); to reference to a massacre of the Jews (a 1929 massacre of members of Hebron's Jewish community, who as it happens, were non-Zionist Palestinian Jews who had lived in the city for generations, and who were made to pay for the massacres of Palestinians in Jerusalem at the hands of the well-armed and British-supported Zionist settlers — a bitterly ironic pattern that was to be repeated over and over again, as Arab Jews from Morocco to Iraq were made to pay for the crimes of Western settler Jews in Palestine); and first and foremost, racially-inscribed right supported by brute force ("This is Jewish land, the Arabs should leave," Hebron's settlers have been repeating for months to any journalist willing to listen).

A Hebron deal had to be struck, if only for the embarrassing way it mimics the real history of Israel. After all, was it not the *Jerusalem Post* that entitled one of its editorials: "Hebron as Parable".

But having been struck, the Hebron deal lays bare the fundamental logic of the peace process. Indeed, the only surprising thing about the sordid twists and turns of that process — as expressed by both the Hebron deal and the recently revealed Yossi Beilin-Michael Eitan Bantustan plan for Palestinian final status — is that Arabs continue to be surprised by them.

Al-Ahram Weekly







Recent works from Esmat Dawestashi's exhibition at the Mashrabiya Gallery

Giving the assembly room

Nigel Ryan on the spaces opened by a generous hand

Esmat Dawestashi's exhibition of recent works at the Mashrabiya Gallery contains a wonderful portrait of the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. It is a cosy image, of a smiling head and shoulders president, with the famous profile accorded its rightful due. It is the sort of image that would at one time have adorned a great many coffee shops. Now the paint surface is less cracked than fissured, with whole sections of the image peeled away so that it resembles nothing so much as a pre-Renaissance mural of some venerable saint, its condition stabilised by modern techniques of restoration. Fixed forever on the point of disintegration, Esmat Dawestashi has rescued this particular image, its present cosiness a function, perhaps, of the ways in which time will reduce such sleekness, framing it in a ring of fluorescent light bulbs and adorning the oval frame with an impressive heraldic cross which on closer inspection is constructed from the mouthpieces of two waterpipes.

Waterpipes, indeed, play an important part in Dawestashi's assemblages. Co-opted and twisted into an heraldic device, the pipes connecting the mouthpiece to the bottle can also be trailed behind and around figures like the intestines of a retro sci-fi monster, or flattened into lacy outlines then glued down to frame other images.

The majority of bits and pieces out of which Dawestashi has concocted this exhibition were found in the rubbish sacks of Khafagi, one of Alexandria's best-known coffee shops. And sensibly, during the second half of Ramadan many of the pieces on show will transfer to the café in whose refuse they had their origins. They will return home, so to speak, transfigured.

It is, in any case, the coffee shop that purports to be the subject of the exhibition. Yet though Dawestashi's wit seldom fails, the more archaeological the reconstruction of his chosen environment the less successful is the finished work. The tablets of clay in which are pressed broken cups, chess and backgammon pieces, like so many layers on an archaeological dig, like so much evidence unearthed, look positively bloodless next to their more exuberant neighbours. The found object, however well presented, remains only itself, which in 1997 is hardly news, unless, of course, you happen to be an archaeologist.

Far more successful are those pieces in which the hand that salvages also rearranges, adding a splash of paint here, an unlikely juxtaposition there. Neat gold frames containing a border of dominoes, broken plates, painted backgrounds, waterpipe mouthpieces and arrangements of dyed dried flowers result in very clever collages in front of which you have to sit for some time before realising quite how the artist has managed the illusion of such depth.

Make no mistake, Dawestashi possesses formidable technique. That he should strike amusing poses does not diminish his technical accomplishments, rather it strips them of that portentous veneer that artists who make art with a capital A so readily assume.

Dawestashi's is a big-hearted exhibition. There is room for everything, for the plaster madonna beneath her little shrine of glass bonbonieres, for the proto-Horus, with pyrex cups, sitting in a sleigh. There is room, too, for the broken plastic doll to become an action hero, for the artist to attempt a modest self-portrait on the base of a box supporting a far from modest construction, and even for a pyramid, though this is enclosed behind four walls lest it attempt to impose itself and in doing so spoil the view.

There is at least one marvelous thing in this exhibition, and much to smile at besides, yet only a single piece has been sold. It is 1997, and still, it would seem, if it is bright, if it makes you smile, if it isn't neatly framed, if it isn't pompous or dour, then the art, or rather, Art buying public isn't interested. And that is a great pity.

Music

God help the crocodiles

Green and growing, **David Blake** watches the ivories being polished

Anas Al-Wogood, Opera in three acts by Aziz El-Shawan; dir Michel Gies; conductor, Youssef El-Sissi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, Jan 5

They asked me how I knew my true love was true. I, of course, replied something here inside tells me what I knew. If you are a beach-comber roaming around musical seashores, looking for that elusive jewel, the Great Egyptian Opera — you will have to go on searching. Something here inside tells me what I knew — that there is plenty inside *Anas Al-Wogood* which is true, faithful and unselfish. And, alas, *Anas* is not this jewel, not that special one.

Anas: why opera anyway — a rag-bag of the arts, very peculiar to the wicked West at its wickedest. Inimitable and unique. Even the Chinese, so clever, have never come up with a proper opera. Yet the West positively thrives on it, adores it and spends ill-gotten millions upon it. So bang or bust, the West's musical genius oozes opera. And its houses, so resplendently vulgar, are temples of an ecstasy produced only by the form.

Anas trembles along through the jungle with Aziz El-Shawan aiming high. As a composer, he made a splendid show, almost Rackhmaninov, of a piano concerto, full of lights and leaps, giving the instrument exactly what big pianists adore: a constant flow of melodies peculiar to the keyboard. Yet, when his composing gift is put to opera, El-Shawan falters, especially when entering the strange arena of *Tosca* and *The Magic Flute*. Has opera defeated him? Not quite. But the enigma of opera is unanswerable, it seems, for any but the wickedest. The evil genius of Wagner opens *Tristan* — hours long — with five words for Isolde to say which makes *Tristan* the Everest of the entire theatre of the West, unsurpassed even by Sophocles.

There are practical facts about opera which must be faced by any composer who opens the gates expecting a welcome into the promised land. It apparently defeated Mahler and Schubert. So our affection and tolerance for El-Shawan must be given to this warrior armed with certain qualities which, alas, are not enough. He doesn't have enough sheer nastiness to play in the big leagues.

The libretto of this opera is problematic, but then libretti are usually contentious and indigestible for all composers, even Verdi, to swallow. This libretto has an interesting story presenting Egypt at one of its innumerable historical face-abouts. The story presents scenes which illuminate the stage. The words are clear, clean and dramatic. Yet what is inside? The core, a love story set in a period of change and chaos, never surfaces. The programme credits are strewn with distinguished names from the literary and archaeological worlds. But unlike *Aida*, their tale never succeeds in facing the innate vulgarity of the theatre which even daunted Beethoven until, after years of combat, he broke into opera with *Fidelio*.

The archaeologists defeated *Anas Al-Wogood* — as with *Palestrina*, sheer learning does not produce a workable opera. This production, compiled from other performances in concert version, has many things of beauty, visual and musical, in it. El-Shawan manages the musical style he sets himself with confidence, but there are holes into which the production falls from which he cannot escape.

Act I has some moments of splendour — arrivals and departures of sultans, Ward, the heroine, the ubiquitous hero Anas El-Wogood and attendants, rich and gleaming, rising to a hieratic climax. But the action is managed in drama school style. So the love story of Anas and Ward has to weave its way through a forest of irrelevancies. Pauses in the telling of the tale positively obliterate interest.

The costumes, as always with the Cairo Opera House, are managed with style, maybe too much, because as it moves into Act II, a little less style and more clarity would have heightened the dramatic temperature. As the story weaves and wanders, time and again El-Shawan's melodic invention saves the scene. Had he lived, maybe Egyptian opera would really have taken the hoped for step into genuine dramatic music.

Two changes of cast took place. They sang the litany of sounds provided, but could never manage to create real people. This is simply not in the libretto. Why, when it is expressly stated that the heroine Ward is a mezzo-soprano, is the part stubbornly given to three senior sopranos of the resident opera company, none of whom have the low tones necessary for the part. Especially ironic given that Hannan El-Guindi, a young, beautiful and fine actress trained in Salzburg and a mezzo-soprano to boot, was allowed the role of someone's old mother.

Raouf Zeidan, as wicked minister and daughter-oppressor, lost even his perfect diction in his role. He got angry, but no one seemed to notice. In fact, no one seemed to notice much dramatically the entire evening. In the last half of this opera appear the only really appealing characters in the show — the chorus line of crocodiles, chief antagonists of Anas in his symbolic struggle against worldly-wise odds to achieve his love for the heroine. These crocodiles wore splendid costumes and managed their balletic movements with reptilian relish.

And at the end, applause time, when they peeled off their jaws and heads to appear as themselves, a line of lively *shebab* from the river-line, they received the handshake of the evening. Left on the stage are *Isis* and the two lovers. She's on high — Pharaonic, Coptic, Nubian, make your choice — in the person of Gihan Fayed, a splendid, no-nonsense soprano voice. Pity she was not given a bit of action. Instead, she stands like a figure, gold-painted, something out of an early James Bond movie, and wishes everyone well. Ward seems to have gone to sleep at her feet. Anas *does* emit the words: "O God, help me — and her". And what about us, the audience? With a new production, *Anas Al-Wogood* might enter a phase of audience rapport, but this might bring us face to face with soap serialisation. We can look forward to *Anas Five*.



Ramzi Yassa: a gift of hands you can't create or purchase by practice

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; solo piano Ramzi Yassa; conductor Hikmet Simsek; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 11 Jan

Hikmet Simsek, new conductor from Ankara, opened *his* concert with a piece of Turkish music by Ferit Tuzun called *Thuyda Thira* — a Turkish candle-lit folk dance. It is in two pieces for a very large orchestra. The first piece is very military, full brass with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra letting itself out in full *fortissimo*. It is military in full sunlight; where are the candles? Instead, the rhythm is a close take-off of *L'Aprentie Sorciere* of Dukas, whose hero makes his appearance hurrying off on magic tricks, bomb-throwing by the sound of it.

The second half begins quietly, romantic. The candles flicker. Midnight sounds. The strings are agitated, abuzz. Not much hope of a peaceful, romantic night. The trumpet sound, and we are off on a night charge — orchestral attack, no holding the army. How many dead lost in the battle? The strings cannot answer, neither can the full *fortissimo*. Anyway, something is played, something lost, something found, that is Hikmet Simsek who is a dynamic conductor even if he looks like a bank manager.

Ramzi Yassa joined him in Beethoven's third concerto. This was another thing altogether. Simsek has a good and forward thrust in tempi, so has Yassa. Together they gave a beautiful, polished golden run of the concerto without a shadow, lit all the way by Yassa's detachment which is removed but never cold.

Yassa has a philosophy of reason and poise. He can fly like lightening, but he never hurries or leaves the tiniest atom unfinished. There is a comforting sense that he is a master of the key-board, but he's too high-mannered to show-off. His technique is tied to an interpretation, often Olympian but never academic. He never teaches — he explains. So reason triumphs. And Yassa has hands that delight, as can be seen. Firm, broad, rounded and muscular — hands that can for sure never make a thin or unproductive sound. A gift of hands you can't create or purchase by practice even.

This third concerto on the journey of Beethoven's Five is a kind of resting place. High above a landscape that falls away in all directions. Fresh and greenly alluring. No angst for projects unachieved or guilt at not making the right impression. Beethoven is the greatest melodist of all, impossible to ever wear or tarnish him — and simple. And so Yassa played him. The *largo* was milky like stars in the firmament. Notes, circles and loops of joy. As a player he has some uniqueness. Pianists today are a stubbly lot. The age almost demands it. And they enjoy showing the hard work. Not so Yassa. From *his* lyre, he strokes joy and plenty.

As he sailed into the final peroration the two hands often became one in their sheer faster-than-light speed. He was happy, and so were the listeners. Something green and growing still exists.

Schumann's symphonies are yet something else, far from the Beethoven Three concerto. What one can say of these symphonies is — why. How did Schumann, the composer of his piano music and the most moving of all lieder — except for Schubert — ever come to put together anything as heavy, lumpy and over-organised as these symphonies. Every effect he tries for, every effort shown, nothing is ever a surprise. You hear it coming bars before it appears, and he never lets you off the hook. Never a jolt or an unexpected resolution. Did Schumann ever hear these symphonies? They come at you like huge buses in traffic jams.

Simsek was so successful at the beautifying job he did on this symphony that he covered Schumann's bus with rose petals. Some conductor.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Esmat Dawestashi (Paintings & Sculptures)
Mashrabiya Gallery. *8 Champollion St, off Tahrir Sq. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 16 Jan.*

Susan Osgood (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery. 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun. 12pm-8pm. Until 21 Jan.

Sami Keshk (Wood Carving)
Cairo Opera Gallery. Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 25 Jan.

Constantin Xenakis
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 355 1871. Daily 10am-9pm. 5-30 Jan.
Retrospective exhibition (1958-1996).

Jean-Pierre Ribière (Photographs)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St. Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-11pm. Until 4 Feb.

Ramadaniat
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 8pm-10pm. Until 8 Feb.
Exhibiting the works of Omar El-Nagdi, along with Mustafa Kamal, Ibrahim Abdel-Malek, Ivon Ezzat and Fares Ahmed Fares.

Zaccaria El-Zeinl (Paintings, drawings & graphics)
Mashrabiya Gallery. 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-2.30pm & 7pm-11pm. 19 Jan-8 Feb.

Group Show
Exhibition Hall, Cairo Meridien Hotel, Garden City. Tel 354 8382. Daily 10am-12am. Until 15 Feb.
Paintings, sculptures and engravings by 30 Egyptian artists.

Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Cairo Opera Gallery, second floor. Opera House Grounds. Gezira. Tel 342 0592. Daily 10am-8pm. Until 15 March.
This year's Biennale has received a lukewarm critical reception. Make up your own mind.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon. 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent Orientalist works.

Zaccaria El-Zeini

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose *Egypt Awakening* became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Ma Nuit Chez Maud
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 16 Jan, 8pm.
Directed by Eric Rohmer (1969), starring Jean-Louis Trintignant, Marie-Christine Barrault, Antoine Vitez and Françoise Fabian.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Jentel (The Gentleman)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.3pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Poussi and Elham Shahin play it for laughs.

Nazwa (The Fling)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.
The Egyptian version of *Fatal Attraction* with Ahmed Zaki, Youssra and Sherine Reda.

Courage Under Fire
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Critical Decision
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Diabolique
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Sharon Stone and Isabelle Adjani play a demonic trick on men.

The Quick and the Dead
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
A gun-slinging Sharon Stone meets her match in Gene Hackman.

The Nutty Professor
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Eddie Murphy, thanks to a chemical experiment, confuses the scales.

Jingle All the Way
MGM, Maadi Grand Mall, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm.

Chain Reaction
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Independance Day
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ramadan Mini-Festival
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
Thursday 16 Jan: **Heat**
Friday 17 Jan: **Independance Day**
Saturday 18 Jan: **Speed**
Sunday 19 Jan: **Critical Decision**
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily midnight.
Thur: **Lethal Weapon III**
Fri: **Fair Game**
Sat: **The Fugitive**
Sun: **Heat**
El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily midnight.
Thur: **Dark Man**
Fri: **Hard Way**
Sat: **Midnight Sting**
Sun: **Dragon**

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 16 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Sayed Awad.

Arabian Evenings
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 & 19 Jan, 8pm.

Arabic Music Ensemble
El-Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq. Tel 391 9956. 16 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Melodies Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, as above. 18 Jan, 8pm.

THEATRE

El-Hares (The Guard)
Abdel-Rehim El-Zerqani Hall, National Theatre. Tel 591 7783. Daily 6pm.
Directed by Mohamed Abdel-Hadi.

Hekmat Hanem... Almaz?
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, as above. Daily 9pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 2444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

El-Ganzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thus, 10pm.

Gonoun El-Banat (The Madness Of Girls)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 8pm.

El-Fares El-Asmar (The Dark Knight)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Thur-Sun 6.30pm; Fri & Sun 11am.

LECTURE

A Vanished Kushite Monument at the 18th Dynasty Temple of Medinet Habu
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 16 Jan, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Peter Dormann, from the Chicago House.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



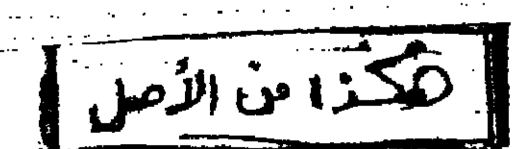
Nabil El-Sonbati

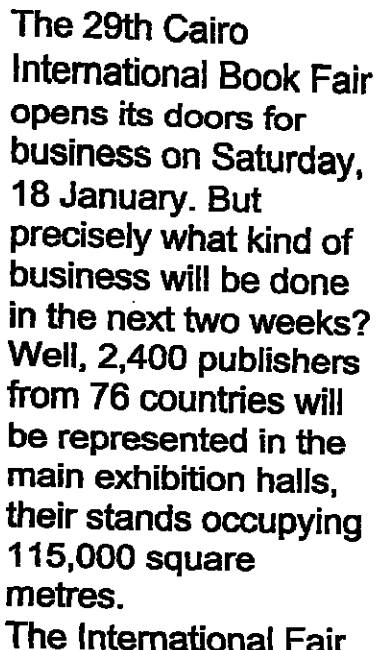
TRADITIONAL handicrafts feature at **Wikalet El-Ghouri** on the occasion of the Arab Festival for Traditional Handicrafts. Space at **Extra Gallery** is given over to glassworks by **Ossama Mohamed**. These are technically accomplished and show a sensitivity to the medium in terms of both colour and texture.

The **Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation** plays host to paintings by **Wissam Fahmi**. These have fantastic landscapes and cityscapes as their subject and are daring in their use of bright, contrasting colours.

The **Atelier du Caire** hosts watercolours by **Ali Azouz** and paintings by **Nabil El-Sonbati**. Azouz's watercolours are expressionist but with an impressionist slant, while El-Sonbati's paintings, exhibited under the title "Birds of Silence", are symbolist and have as their subject the woes and sorrows of humanity.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***




The 29th Cairo International Book Fair opens its doors for business on Saturday, 18 January. But precisely what kind of business will be done in the next two weeks? Well, 2,400 publishers from 76 countries will be represented in the main exhibition halls, their stands occupying 115,000 square metres.

The International Fair Grounds, in Nasr City, will, for the duration of the fair, contain 3.6 million books, which optimistic publishers hope to off load onto the millions of expected visitors. Nor does this figure include books brought to the grounds by second-hand dealers who expect, as in previous years, to do a roaring trade.

Al-Ahram Weekly, opening its coverage of the event, talks to publishers on the fringe about whether or not...


photo: Yves Paris

all's fair at the fair

So it's here again — the perennial cultural gala event, invariably heralded by the organisers' optimism in face of endemic problems. According to Samir Sarhan, head of the General Egyptian Book Organisation, the state publishing house which presides over the fair, this year's event is even bigger than usual. Far from being put off by the fair's ever-changing dates, foreign publishers, he asserted, were even more numerous at the 29th event. "In addition to countries that have always participated, this year Qatar, Albania and Poland will also be represented at the fair," Sarhan averred.

Be that as it may, there is a growing suspicion among publishers that the fair — that sprawling being — suffers an ill-conceived role: is it a gigantic book bazaar or does it also represent a trade forum where problems of the book industry in the region can be discussed and publishers can secure access to foreign distributors? *Al-Ahram Weekly* spoke to representatives of two publishing houses outside the mainstream — Nur, an Arab women's publishing house, and the English language American University in Cairo Press — to determine how this quintessentially "establishment" event is viewed from the margins.

"The event," in the words of Hasnaa Miqdashi, director of Nur and member of the board of Arab children's publishing house Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi, "has long become a book bazaar and not a book fair, the only added benefit being the cultural events on the fringe. "Among her most trenchant criticisms against the fair is the fact "there are no trade days, even though they always announce them. We [the publishers] may discuss the problems of the book trade with the authorities at a lecture, but then the fair ends without anything being done."

Thus, such problems as "the transport of the book from one Arab state to another, and its transport within a single country" go unresolved, while "the focus of the cultural activities goes to poetry readings and debates about issues other than the problems of the book industry." Turning her attention to the cultural activities and seminars within what they attempt to do, Miqdashi finds a number of insufficiencies in the way they are handled.

"It's always the same faces, and even when you get controversial people at the seminars, they don't turn up again and you're left wondering if there is a form of censorship at work."

There is, in her opinion, more attention devoted by the organisers to fringe cultural activities than to the book.

Mark Linz, director of the AUC Press, expresses — in milder terms — the same view about the fair being essentially a bazaar. Having worked at AUC Press at two different periods, the first from 1983 to '86 and again since returning to Egypt in 1995, Linz is an old hand at the fair. At previous book fairs in the '80s, he says, he "organised seminars for visiting foreign publishers... but with the highly unreliable scheduling of the fair, any kind of meaningful international exchange is very difficult to organise."

As to the fair in its capacity as a bazaar, as well as the dividends accrued from it to AUC Press, Linz sounds a generally favourable note. He says he is happy about the expansion of AUC Press which now brings "40 new publications a year — it used to be less than 20". And the fair, he maintains, represents for the AUC stand, "a chance to reach a wider audience of Egyptian readers and expatriates." Primarily, Linz adds, AUC Press goes to the fair as a "foreign language publisher producing Arabic literature in translation." But in addition to AUC Press's own "scholarly, educational and general publications, [AUC] bookstore carries English language publications" that are also marketed at the fair.

Given that AUC has its own permanent outlets for its publications in the form of AUC bookstores, did the book fair also present an opportunity to gauge the interests of a wide, general readership in the university's publications which may differ from those of the predominantly academic customers of the bookstores? Linz seems to find the difference quantitative, rather than qualitative. The press, he adds, will be launching a number of titles at the fair this year, among them Naguib Mahfouz' *Echoes of an Autobiography* and Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Houses Behind the Trees*, both translated by Denys Johnson-Davies.

Linz's optimism is not shared by Miqdashi who finds that small publishing houses can actually lose money at the fair, given the high rates for renting exhibition space.

"The rent for a stand at the fair now costs a minimum of at least LE 7,000. So if we're talking about a small publishing house, it needs to carry at least 1,000 titles to cover expenses, let alone make profit — which is never the case, "says Miqdashi. Describing the organisers' policy as "commercial", Miqdashi calls for subsidies for small publishers. Contrasting the situation of small, progressive publishers with publishers of religious books who receive subsidies from various quarters, she feels it is imperative that GEBO both examines its organisation of the fair and redefines its aims for the event.

"There should be insight and planning regarding what is to be offered at the fair," says Miqdashi, "for though GEBO has an 'enlightenment' project, this is not sufficient."

Expressing the reservation that she is "not advocating censorship", Miqdashi adds that many of the "heritage" religious books are reprinted without any editing, revision or control.

"You find old books [at the fair], but not new ones, nor is there any emphasis on the pedagogical, educational, awareness-raising aspect of the fair." Miqdashi pauses for breath before announcing: "Whoever pays gets."

The financial considerations enumerated by Miqdashi, particularly burdensome on a small publishing house, have an even more detrimental effect on sales of children's books, as she has observed through her involvement in Dar Al-Fatta Al-Arabi. Given that children's books need to be in colour and are therefore pricy, they should — but don't necessarily — receive substantial subsidies from ministries if they are to be at all within reach of the average budget of an Egyptian family at the fair, she explains. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that "everything is piled higgeldy-piggeldy, without any order or classification, or sorting."

Asked how he rated the fair in terms of display and organisation, Linz remarked that "everybody's always trying to be helpful, both in the international stands and in the sales areas." Falling silent for a moment, Linz adds that "it all depends on what standards you apply: if you want it to be like the Frankfurt Book Fair, you have to apply different standards." But the Cairo International Book Fair, in his opinion, nevertheless "has its own flavour: it's lively, it's personal and people actually read the books."

And Linz's realistic recipe for an improved fair? "It might be helpful", he suggests "for an advisory council of Egyptian and foreign publishers to review both the commercial and cultural aspects of the fair and develop something more dependable and more visible."

Another proposal he makes is "for a prize to be established and presented at the fair every year to international, prominent authors, publishers and booksellers."

To Miqdashi, who has no doubt about the potential of the role that the fair can play in the Arab world ("the Cairo International Book Fair is as important in the region as the Frankfurt Book Fair is in Europe"), the event's current state is "saddening". The authorities should, in her opinion, "place greater emphasis on the message and conception of the fair".

29th Cairo International Book Fair: seminar programme


El-Sayed Yassin


Sabri Abdallah


Itidal Othman


Hala El-Badri


Ahdaf Soueif


Amin El-Alim




Lutfi El-Kholi




Abdel-Moeti Hegaz

Programme of main seminars

Venue: Seminar Hall, Saraya Al-Istithmar, International Fairgrounds, Nasr City.

Sat 18
7.30-9.30pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Khusousiya Wal-Kawniya (Specificity and Globalism)
Author Mahmoud Amin El-Alim discusses his book with Abdel-Moneim Talima, Hossam Issa and Sayed Yassin.
9.30-11.30pm
Open forum with Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. Theme: The future of Egyptian culture. Panellists: Anis Mansour, Abdel-Qadir El-Qitt, Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi and Lutfi El-Kholi.
11.30pm-1am
Poetry reading by Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi.

Sun 19
7.30-9.30pm
Author and work seminar:
Taqrir Al-Hala Al-Diniya Fi Misr (Report on the State of Religion in Egypt), published by the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies
Panellists: Nabil Abdel-Fattah, Diaa Rashwan, Mohamed Al-Sayed Said, Hala Mustafa, Hassan Hanafi and Atef El-Iraqi.
9.30-11.30pm
Open forum with State Minister of Administration, Reform and Environment Atef Ebeid. Theme: Egypt's transformation into a market economy. Panellists: Ismail Sabri Abdallah, Gouda Abdel-Khalek, Ibrahim Kamel, Abdel-Aziz Hegazi and Ramzi Zaki.
11.30pm-1am
Poetry reading by Saadi Youssef.

Mon 20
7.30-9.30pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Ummiya Al-Diniya Wal-Harb Didd Al-Islam (Religious Illiteracy and the War Against Islam).
Author Ragab El-Banna discusses his book with Sayed Tantawi, Mohamed El-Gohari, Mohamed Zakzouk and Mahmoud Abdel-Moneim Riyad.
9.30-11.30pm
Open forum with Osama El-Baz. Theme: Globalisation and the future of the world. Panellists: Ismail Sabri Abdallah and El-Sayed Yassin.
11.30pm-1am
Poetry reading by Samih Al-Qassim.

Tues 21
7.30-9.30pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Tariq Ila Al-Mustaqbal (The Path to the Future).
Author Fahmi Gadaan discusses his book with Hassan Hanafi, Mahmoud Amin El-Alim and Mustafa Nabil.
9.30-11.30pm
Open forum with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Theme: Peace efforts and the future of the region. Panellists: Anis Mansour, Saadeddin Wahba and Lutfi El-Kholi.
11.30pm-1am
Poetry reading by Farouk Guweida.

Wed 22
7.30-9.30pm
Seminar on "Science, technology and questions about the future".
Panellists: Minister of Scientific Research Venus Gouda, Mohamed El-Farouk El-Shamsi, Sabri El-Shabrawi and Sabri Said.
9.30-11.30pm
Open forum with Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin. Theme: Egypt's national project until the year 2000. Panellists: Hamed Ammar, Abdel-Azim Anis, Murad Wahba, Kamel Zuheiri and Leila Takla.
11.30pm-1am
Poetry reading by Mohamed Al-Faytouri.

Cultural Café Programme

Venue: behind Saraya Talata (third exhibition hall)

Sun 19
9.-11pm
Ahdaf Soueif her collection of short stories *Zeinat Al-Haya* (Ornament of Life) with Samia Ramadan, Shaker Abdel-Hamid, Sanaa Anas Al-Wogoud and Hala El-Badri.
11pm-12.30am
Farag El-Antari discusses the contribution of Riad El-Sunbati, as part of the figures of enlightenment series of seminars.
12.30am
Song recital.

Mon 20
8-9.30pm
Debate on folkloric heritage; participants: Farouk Khourshid, Ahmed Mursi and Safwat Kamal.
9.30-11pm
Debate on "the question of revival in Egypt"; participants: Fathi Abdel-Fattah, Sayed El-Qimani, Diaa Rashwan, Nabil Abdel-Fattah and Rifaat Sallaam.
11pm-12.30am
Ni'amat El-Biheiri discusses her work *Irtihalat Al-Lu'lu* (Journeys of Pearls) with Shaker Abdel Hamid, Huda Zakaria and Mohamed Mustagab.
12.30am
Song recital.

Tues 21
8-9.30pm
Khairi Shalabi discusses his work *Suhbat Al-Ushaaq* (In the Company of Lovers) with the public.
9.30-11pm
Naglaa Allaam discusses her work *Afial Saghira Lam Tamut Ba'd* (Baby Elephants, Not Yet Dead) with Sayed El-Bahrawi, Itidal Othman and Magdi Tewfik.
11pm-12.30am
Fawziya Asaad discusses her novel *L'Egyptienne* with Bashir El-Siba'i, Ahmed Othman and Mahmoud Qassem.
12.30-2am
A reading of colloquial Arabic poetry by Youssri Hassan, Sadek Sharshar, Bahaa Awad and Tarek Hashem.

Wed 22
8-9.30pm
Fatma Moussa, Fathia El-Assal and Ali Fahmi discuss the contribution of Salama Moussa, as part of the figures of enlightenment series of seminars.
9.30-11pm
Fouad Qandil discusses his work *Al-Ghandoura* (The Coquette) with Abdel-Qadir El-Qitt and Youssef Nofal.
11pm-12.30am
An encounter with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair.
12.30am
Song recital.

Programme of specialised seminars

Venue: Saraya Talata (third exhibition hall), first floor.

Mon 20
8.30-10pm
Seminar on cultural co-operation between Egypt and France. Panellists: Catherine Farhi, Philippe Chevrin and Claude Bourie.

Tues 21
8.30-10pm
Seminar on quality production and the Egyptian industry. Panellists: Ibrahim Hassan Mohamed, Mohamed Abul-Fath Nassar, Nabil Nassef and Mohamed Hilal.

Wed 22
8.30-10pm
Seminar on El-Sayed Eleiwa's book *Idarat Al-Azamaat Wal-Kawarith* (Crisis management). Panellists: Farouk El-Tallawi, Safwat Shaker, Rashad El-Hamlawi, Awatef Abdel-Rahman and Siddiq Afifi.

Cinema programme

Saraya Al-Sinema Wal-Masrah (Cinema and Theatre Hall)

Children's films

Sun 19
11.30am-1pm
Journey of Surprises.
1.30-3pm
Land of Dwarfs.

Mon 20
130am-1pm
Red Riding Hood.
1.30-3pm
The Little Girl and the Whale.

Tues 21
130am-1pm
My New Family.
1.30-3pm
The Pony.

Wed 22
130am-1pm
Land of Dwarfs.
130-3pm
The Little Magician.

Documentary film programme
Time: 8.30pm

Sun 19
Suqout Al-Aliha (The Fall of the Gods), dir Mohamed Khairi.

Mon 20
Kinouz Al-Wadi (Treasures of the Valley), dir Essam Bughdadi.

Tues 21
Masgid Al-Rifa'i (Al-Rifa'i Mosque), dir Hussein El-Tayeb.

Wed 22
Al-Arman Fi Masr (The Armenians in Egypt), dir Nabil Ezzat.

All information correct at time of going to press, though changes to programmes are likely to occur

Plain Talk

The campaign initiated by the *Al-Ahram Weekly* for the preservation and restoration of historic buildings seems to have attracted national attention. Yesterday a symposium on the issue was held at the Mubarak Library. The event was initiated by the *Weekly* together with the Fulbright Commission. The symposium was presided over by Mrs Susan Mubarak. Also present at the event were members of NGOs and conservation campaigners.

What initially led the *Weekly* to adopt the issue is the urgency of safeguarding Egypt's remaining monuments of historical, cultural and architectural value, particularly in view of the fact that many have already been demolished while others are in danger of toppling if they are not restored.

I personally remember the time when, in the early sixties, I was working with the minister of culture and our offices were located in, of all places, Abdin Palace. That beautiful abode of khedives and kings housed different government departments, apart from the Ministry of Culture, including the Cairo Governorate and others. It almost brought tears in the eyes of those, like me, who had witnessed better days for the palace. It was only during President Sadat's time that the palace was reinstated to its former splendour. There are many other instances of flagrant neglect of Egypt's architectural heritage. Hence the importance of the official response to the *Weekly*'s campaign, which we all hope is just the first step towards the creation of a national consciousness of our heritage.

During my recent visit to England I had the chance of meeting the head of the National Heritage of England, and of discussing with him and a number of his colleagues the steps taken by the department for the preservation and protection of British heritage. Although each culture has its specificity, I believe some guidelines can be drawn from the English model.

Heritage, according to the department, falls into three categories: ancient monuments, historic buildings and conservation areas, official interest in which dates back to the 19th century. Concurrently, a second area of interest emerged: the protection of historic buildings which are still in use, as opposed to unoccupied monuments. This process is known as the "listing" of a given monument, whereby the blue plaque placed outside the building both tells of the illustrious figures who once lived in or used the place, and signifies the official protection of the building from demolition or remodelling. As to the third category, this covers not individual monuments and building, but conservation areas where limited control of development is intended to protect the character and appearance of an entire district or neighbourhood.

Here in Egypt the first and second categories are the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture through its arm, the Supreme Council of Antiquities. The third process is, as yet, considered a luxury that may come at a later stage. What concerns me here is the second category. For though the houses of Taha Hussein and Ahmed Shawqi have been converted into museums, there are many more homes of writers, artists and thinkers that have not found their way on the preservation agenda.

According to the head of the department of the National Heritage of England which now oversees the scheme of placing commemorative plaques, there are strict selection criteria. Firstly, there is to be reasonable grounds for believing that the subjects, whose houses are to bear the plaques, are regarded as eminent by a majority of members of their own professions or calling: "they shall have made some important positive contribution to human welfare or happiness; they shall have had such exceptional and outstanding personalities that the well-informed passer-by immediately recognizes their names."

Figures thus recognised will have been dead for at least twenty years. Besides, plaques could be erected for foreigners, provided they should have had international reputations or were of significant standing in their own countries and should have lived in London for a significant period. Thus one comes across such names as Berlioz, Canaletto, De Gaule, Freud and Marx, besides all English celebrities.

Apart foum the English government's department a number of NGOs are also concerned with heritage, the leading among which is the National Trust. It is a voluntary body with over two million members and since its establishment in 1985, it has become the largest private landowner and conservation society. Thus, there is an elaborate system of legal protection for architectural heritage, with substantial fines against those who breach it.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram Weekly

16 - 22 January 1997

Red Sea view

Mountain lions, ostriches, gazelles, emerald mines and historic ruins are just some of the attractions luring investors to remote regions of Egypt's southern Red Sea coast. **Rehab Saad** inspected the area's development

Qusseir is one of the new resorts on the Red Sea which emerged only a few years ago and is still waiting for more investors

photo: Jihan Ammar

Hurghada is no longer a main target of investors, who see it as overrun with tourist projects and concrete buildings — the result of bad planning. Abu Soma, Sahl Hasheesh, Qusseir, Marsa Alam and Bernice, on the other hand, represent new and exciting possibilities, first for investors, and then, the investors hope, for tourists.

"The area between Safaga and Ras Banas is a promising area for development," said Adel Radi, head of the Tourist Development Authority (TDA). He said that the national project for the development of southern Egypt is geared toward providing 200,000 more rooms by the year 2017. This will include the areas north of Hurghada, Hurghada itself and south, as far as the Sudanese border.

Building in areas like Hurghada has been happening at such an accelerated pace that there is little room for further development. A group of investors who are planning to carry out similar projects on the Red Sea coast, however, say that they have learned their lesson. Future development will be well planned.

New tourism areas are being built around seven main sites: Ras Abu Soma, Sahl Hasheesh, Qusseir, the Qusseir-Marsa Alam sector, Marsa Alam, Wadi El-Gemal and Bernice near the Sudanese border.

As one proceeds south from Hurghada on the Red Sea coast, she passes through these new areas, each of which has its own distinctive environmental conditions, potential for activities and special attractions. The only thing they have in common is the sun, sea and beautiful weather year-round. The potential for tourism development seems limitless.

Ras Abu Soma

"The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs...
Come, my friends, 'tis not too late to seek
a better world..."

"A better world" is the very description used by investors to promote their new project in Soma Bay on the Red Sea coast. Inspired by the words of Alfred Tennyson, they are trying to turn their resort into a place where elements of luxury and peacefulness comingle, creating an ambience of relaxed elegance.

In fact, the peninsula of Ras Abu Soma is ideally situated in the heartland of Egypt's southern coast, 48km south of Hurghada. It is accessible by air and land, and because of its proximity to Luxor, offers an opportunity for "same-day" excursions to some of Egypt's most famous monuments.

Like other Red Sea resorts, Soma Bay consists of soft, sandy beaches, turquoise waters and exquisite coral reefs. The area is well known for its excellent dive sites, deep-sea fishing, wind surfing and sailing.

In order to develop this unique peninsula into a world-class tourism complex, Egypt's Ministry of Tourism has assigned the Abu Soma Development Company (ASD) to draw up and execute a development plan for the property. The plan divides the development of Abu Soma into phases. The first, targeted for completion later this year, includes a central utility centre with related distribution systems and a road network.

Among the first facilities to be built in the bay will be a marina, along with a commercial and recreational centre. The marina will be able to accommodate 50 vessels, and is designed to minimise environmental pollution along the coastline.

The commercial and recreational centre will feature a central plaza connected to the beach by a walkway. The commercial centre will offer open-air restaurants, a variety of retail outlets and souks. Essential services, including a multi-bed clinic and a decompression chamber for divers, will also be provided.

Two architecturally distinct five-star hotels will be constructed. Offering extensive catering and recreational facilities, the Soma Bay Hotels will be linked by a common beach-front walkway. Two additional hotels are currently in the planning stages.

The Soma Bay Golf and Country Club will provide an athletic and social focal point for the peninsula's community. Designed to international standards, the golf course will be a full-size, 18-hole course. A number of tennis courts will also be built, along with a large swimming pool and landscaped terraces.

A number of smaller sites overlooking Soma Bay's eastern coastline have been reserved for villa construction. These are suitable either for the construction of small villa clusters or, in certain cases, for individual villas built on exceptionally large, self-contained plots whose privacy and boundaries are defined and secured by the land's natural topography.

Sahl Hasheesh

Sahl Hasheesh is another site on the Red Sea recently marked for development. Located 20km south of Hurghada, the area will be turned into a tourist paradise containing 1,200 rooms. The Egyptian Company of Tourist Resorts is responsible for overseeing the LE700 million project.

"This will be one of the gigantic resorts built on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba through which Egyptian tourism will enter a new phase, where all facilities and services will be integrated and the tourist product will be varied," said Dr Mamdouh El-Beltagui, the minister of tourism, at his meeting with investors.

The Egyptian Company of Tourist Resorts is building the infrastructure, including gardens, trade centres, sporting facilities and houses for workers. Sahl Hasheesh will provide 20,400 direct and approximately 120 indirect job opportunities.

The first stage of the project is expected to be finished in five years. Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, head of the Union of Banks, announced that this is the first time that such a large project has been planned with Egyptian capital. While the project is being funded by the National Bank of Egypt, four insurance companies, Pyramisa Company, Ghabbour Company and others, 40 per cent is open to public investment. "Therefore the field is open to everybody," he said.

"This project is expected to be four times more profitable to the Egyptian economy than Hurghada. In fact, Hurghada could be said to be the first stage of the Sahl Hasheesh project," said Ahmed Zaki, head of the Union of Tourist Chambers.

Qusseir

Sunshine, clean air and wide open spaces is what investors want to maintain in Qusseir, 140kms south of Hurghada.

"This is the most ancient city on the Red Sea. From here Queen Hatshepsut sent trade missions to Punt on the Somali coast and the ancient routes of pilgrimage can be traced," said head of the city council Abuel Haggag Abdel-Rehim.

Abdel-Rehim described Qusseir as a comprehensive city: "Like other Red Sea resorts it has virgin beaches, coral reefs and untouched marine life, but above all, history makes it distinctive from other cities. We have the Ottoman fortress and the old houses of Qusseir which can be restored and turned into tourist attractions."

Abdel-Rehim believes that Qusseir could be developed in a way that maintains both its character as a historic city and its position as one of the world's best diving destinations, as described in a German tourist magazine.

"The city has not yet been developed, although the coast has been sold out and more than 90 projects are being approved to turn the hitherto quiet city into a thriving hub of tourism," he said.

Abdel-Rehim stressed that both investors and the city council have learned a lesson from Hurghada. "We will not close the beaches and limit their use to the tourist villages. Instead, there will be 50 metres of beach left between each village and the next, and every five kilometres there will be a public beach," he said.

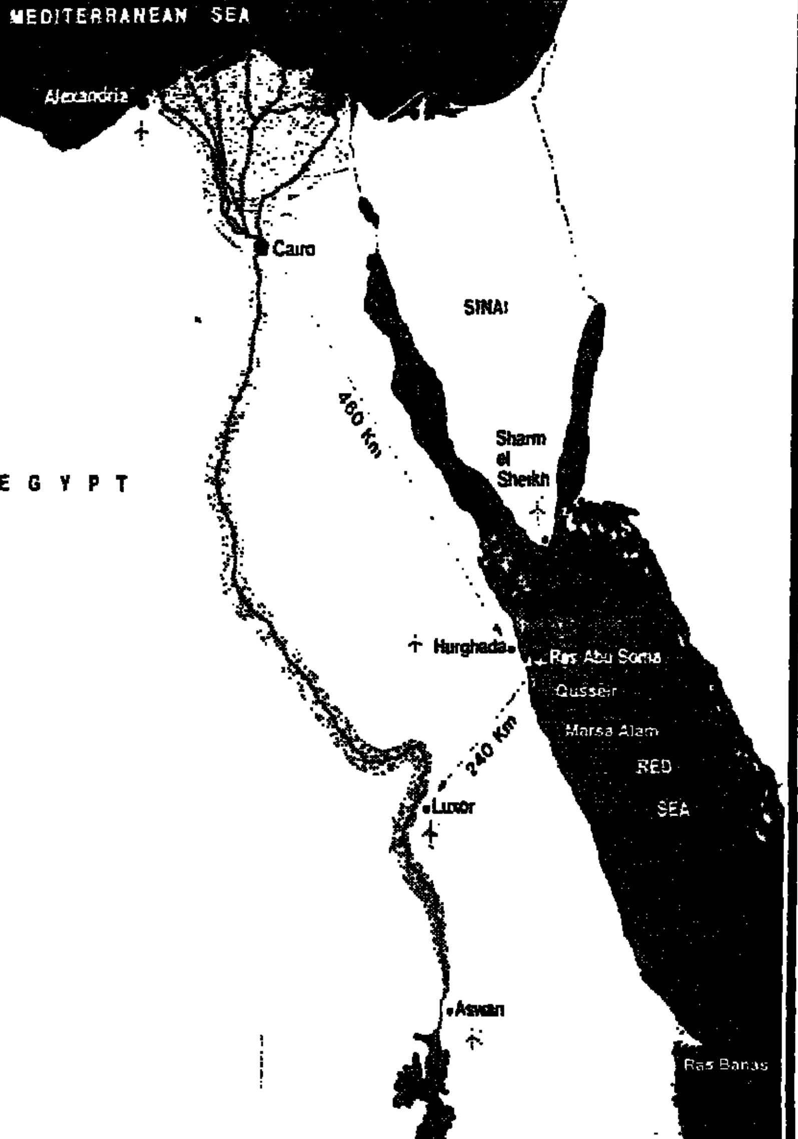
"Moreover," he added, "there are conditions for construction. We demanded that investors be committed to the dome-shape of buildings similar to those at the Mövenpick Hotel — one of the city's pioneer projects. The idea is that when we use the material of the surrounding environment, the buildings become one with nature."

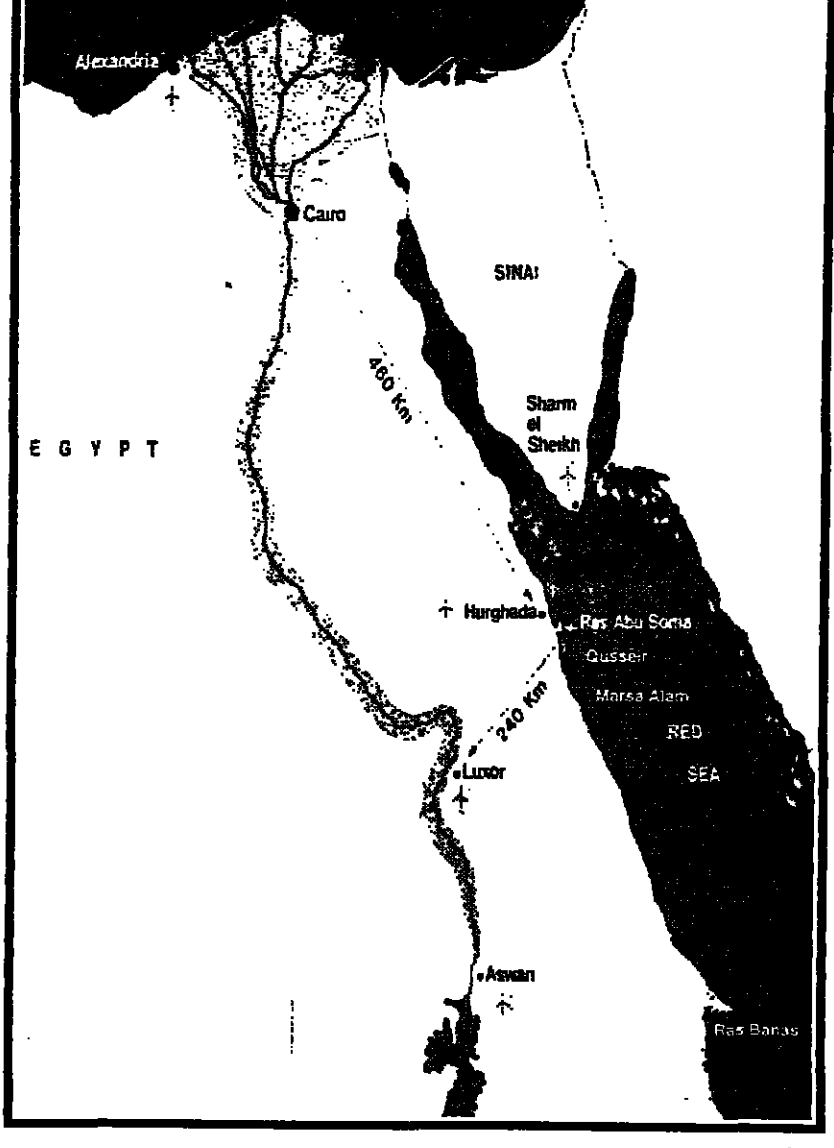
Investors in the Qusseir area understand that preserving the environment means more tourists and consequently more income. "Our motto is to keep the environment clean. Nobody will be allowed to walk on the reefs, no fishing, no jet skiing and thus no pollution," said Safwat Badr, general manager of the Mövenpick Hotel in Qusseir.

As the city is still underdeveloped and a bit distant from other resorts on the Red Sea coast, investors are naturally facing some of the problems normally experienced by pioneers.

"Our biggest problem is that we are far from the airport. The nearest is Hurghada's, 140km away. The second problem is telephones. All our lines are connected to a cable network from Cairo. When it is down, we are isolated from the world. The third problem is workers. Because tourism is something new for the inhabitants of Qusseir, in the beginning no one was encouraged to work with us. However, citizens of Qusseir have started to recognise the benefits of tourism and have started to apply for jobs in the field. Now about 65 per cent of our workers are from Qusseir," Badr said.

Hans Kaller, general manager of Fanadir Tourist Village, says the biggest problem is water. "We have to wait for the government water trucks to come and fill the reservoir. We suffer in peak seasons," he said. Under the new scheme, every investor must agree to the establishment of a desalination plant. This is one of the conditions for investment.





Qusseir-Marsa Alam

The sector, Qusseir-Marsa Alam, is still undeveloped. Plans have however been set in motion for this promising area.

According to studies carried out by the Tourist Development Authority (TDA), a lot of prime locations are waiting for investors.

The first is Wadi El-Naba El-Saghir, 235km from Hurghada Airport, an area renowned for its coral reefs and historical mines. Potential tourist development in the area will include a number of hotels, a tourist village, and camping sites.

Second location is Wadi Gelwa, 197km from Hurghada Airport. It is well-known for fishery, mangroves, marine life and coral reefs. It is also a place where the Bashariya and Ababda tribes have settled communities and where mines were exploited in ancient times.

Other locations include Ras Trommbey, Marsa Om Gieag, Sharm Bahary, Sharm Qebly, Marsa Shagara, Marsa Shony, Marsa Ghaleb, Marsa Om Grifat and Beir Assel, all promising areas with coral reefs, rich marine life and historical mines and waiting for those pioneers who can turn them into places full of life and tourists.

Marsa Alam

Marsa Alam is a remote area where tourist activity is still in the bud but which is expected, in the very near future, to have a new lease of life. At present it is suitable only for diving safari trips which are organised each week. The proposed airport is guaranteed to change its aura.

At present there are four camping sites operating at Marsa Alam besides the rest house of King Farouk. They fall into two categories.

"The first are permanent but simple mud brick camps that include a kitchen, a diving club and other simple facilities which adventure tourists are interested in. The other are mobile camps," said Zoheir, one of the young investors in Hurghada.

However, camp sites are not the ultimate goal of the government in this area. All efforts are being directed to turn Marsa Alam into a major tourist area. To facilitate the job of investors, the government early this year issued a cabinet decree approving the establishment of an airport at Marsa Alam by the private sector. This is the first time the way has been opened for the private sector to contribute to such a large national project through the B.O.T system (build, operate, and transfer). "The private sector will build and operate the airport for a certain length of time after which it will be transferred to the government," said Dr Mamdouh El-Beltagui, the minister of tourism.

Tourist officials and investors are confident that this airport will change the map of the southern part of the Red Sea coast, guaranteeing the flocking of tourists to Marsa Alam and places such as Qusseir, Wadi El-Gamal and Bernice.

Wadi El-Gemal

Wadi El-Gemal was first mentioned during the third Middle East economic summit recently held in Cairo. In ancient times it was known as Wadi El-Gamal (Valley of Beauty) and Wadi El-Mal (Valley of Wealth) in reference to three emerald mines that date back to the Pharaonic era.

It extends 48km to a width of 1.2km along the Red Sea coast, 40km south of Marsa Alam, and is an area endowed with a vast coastal area with clear water, coral reefs, a variety of aquatic plants besides good weather all the year round.

Investors will enjoy privileges offered by the Egyptian government's Investment Law No 230: elimination of price control and profit ceilings, facilitation of formalities for licences and approvals, export and import, and custom duty on imported equipment and machinery as well as tax exemption for 15 years.

According to the TDA plan for the Wadi El-Gemal sector, it can be classified as a distinctive tourist area which has been earmarked north and south of the central area, built on an estimated 600 feddans. Its attractions are related to visual beauty, sandy beaches and accessibility for swimming and diving activities.

There are also natural bays such as Sharm El-Loly which is a semi-enclosed gulf with potential for marina development and yachting.

Moreover, there are buffer areas of natural beauty with rocky shores which are not suitable for tourist activities due to strong wave action and rocky mountains, and "safari areas" which are suitable for motor trips and camping sites.

The accommodation capacity at Wadi El-Gemal could eventually reach 8,800 double rooms at three, four and five star hotels.

Again certain conditions to investors concerning the environment have been set up: trees at the site must not be destroyed. The hunting of wild creatures is prohibited. Any activities or procedures that may cause harm to wildlife, air, or water, either directly or indirectly, are prohibited, and lastly there must be an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of every project.

Bernice

Bernice is the last resort on the Red Sea open for development. It is the nearest resort to the Sudanese border and is envisioned as a new city and a world class international multi-resort complex located on the Red Sea. The site for the proposed development encompasses the peninsula of Ras Banas which forms a bay, the largest protected bay on the Egyptian coast. The location is spectacular from the scenic point of view and is ideal for a four season destination resort.

Founded in 275B.C, Bernice flourished as a port and commercial centre for over 500 years and served as a junction to the trade routes from the Nile Valley, Africa, India, the Near East and Europe. The rich history of the area includes the ruins of a Ptolemaic city, ancient emerald mines in the adjacent mountains, and the tomb of Sheikh Banas.

The site also enjoys clean air, warm winters and a pristine marine environment with an abundance of world famous virgin reefs and coral gardens directly accessible from the shore for snorkelling and scuba diving. Beautiful sandy beaches, protected waters, and breathtaking views of the sea from mountains along the shore are characteristics of the peninsula.

The master plan for this area incorporates sensitive, comprehensive environmental planning. It calls for a new city to cater for a population of 200,000 inhabitants and development into a commercial and support centre for the resort.

Four distinctive and highly suitable areas were selected for development, each with its own unique site environs: Ras Banas, Philadelphus Point, Mersa Sataiya and Kira El-Hirtiwai will each become self contained full service resorts.

Each will have its distinctive and unique architecture and site development theme. The four resorts will have a total of 9,995 hotel rooms, 2,833 condominium units, 356 apartments, 867 residential villa lots and commercial and entertainment areas. Areas not suitable for development will be left as protected open spaces, at once preserving the scenic quality of the area and forming a bond between the man-made environment and the mountains, the desert and the sea.

Officials believe that Bernice will attract international and local tourists and will have a broad range of accommodation and activities to cater to the recreational tourist, the cultural tourist, eco-tourist, leisure tourist and business gatherings. They also expect that the largest market for tourism will come from northern and southern Europe, from nearby Middle Eastern countries and from Cairo and Egyptians working in Middle Eastern countries who spend their vacations in Egypt. Additional markets are expected to include North America and Japan.

Bernice is adjacent to a military base which has an excellent existing port and airport that can be altered for commercial and military use. The possibility of sharing both the port and airport facilities would provide direct international flights and regional commuter service along with port facilities to support the Bernice resort development. The area could be tied up with regional cultural tourism as available in Aswan on Lake Nasser and in Luxor.

South of Bernice is Gebel Elba, the highest mountain in Egypt and a lush area of tropical vegetation. Home to mountain lions, ostrich, monkeys and gazelles, the area is inhabited by Ababda and Bashariya tribesmen and protected by the laws of the Gebel Elba Nature Preserve. This phenomenal region is being studied by anthropologists and naturalists. The surrounding mountains could offer safaris to ancient emerald mines and other historic ruins. A future connection via a road between Bernice, Aswan and Lake Nasser, would benefit both tourist destinations and accelerate the development of both distinctly different resort experiences.

As investors head southward to explore the tourist potential on some of the Red Sea's unbeaten track sites, one can only hope that the inevitable changes will not be too drastic.



photos: Amr Gamal

International horse riders performing at the 7th Mövenpick International Championship (left and bottom) and Karim El-Zoghby, (right) who outlasted his opponents and was winner of the Grand Prix

Ride, jump and win

Egypt's promising young prodigy, horse rider Karim El-Zoghby outlasted his opponents and delighted the spectators with his distinguished performance at the 7th Mövenpick International Equestrian Championship. Inas Mazhar reports



Guests at the Heliopolis Mövenpick Hotel must have wondered if they were staying at a traditional *caravansarai* if they happened to wander into the back gardens last week. The hotel hosted 45 well known international riders during its world recognised three-day annual equestrian championship. Organised by Adel Atta, hotel executive assistant manager, the show-jumping tournament attracted equestrians from 20 nations including Germany, Spain, England, Switzerland, France, Austria, as well as a number of Arab countries. Egypt was represented by Adham Hamad, Ahmed El-Sawaf, Mohamed El-Wakil, Karim El-Zoghby, Hadi Gabr, and Amr El-Abd.

Held under the auspices of the ministries of interior and tourism in cooperation with the Police Sports Union and the Egyptian Equestrian Federation, the event was sponsored by a variety of local multinational companies.

The first day of the show hosted a qualifying competition of one round and one jump off. 88 riders competed in the individual 12 fence-course where Karim El-Zoghby drew the attention of the audience by clinching first place with a 32.57 second errorless ride. He was followed by Guy Goosen of England in second place with 32.87 seconds, promising Alexandrine rider Amr El-Abd clocking in at 32.87 seconds for third, and Adham Hamad of Egypt in fourth.

In the Grand Prix on the next day, amidst raised competition stakes and obstacles, it was El-Zoghby once again who snatched the title after he succeeded in concluding the one round and two jump-offs by clocking in at 32.29 seconds. He was followed by veteran Mohamed El-Wakil with 44.08 seconds and at 31.41 seconds, the experienced Hamad. England's Goosen followed in fourth.

The final day was the peak of the competition. Six teams competed in the two rounds and one jump off. The winning team comprised Spain's Alfredo Duran and Fernando Sarasola, Ibrahim El-Meligui of Egypt and Jordan's Hani Besharat.

Among those who distinguished themselves as the stars of the show was Egyptian leading junior rider Zoghby. Although it was his first participation in the Mövenpick equestrian competition — he appeared as the black horse of the show — Zoghby had previously represented his country in two international competitions.

Lars Neiberg, the German Olympic team gold medalist, came to Cairo after successful indoor shows in Brussels and Geneva, and placing second in the Mitsubishi Cup.

The Mövenpick tournament's accomplishment is rooted in the great number of well known international riders competing. And the improvement in the performance of the Egyptian riders made for strong competition.

Moreover, the quality of the horses offered by Egyptian riders and clubs was of benefit to the guest equestrians. Each Egyptian rider presented at least one horse to a guest rider for use in the tournament. In the days before the event each rider was able to try out and choose among a variety of carefully selected horses.

Although challenging, the exclusive competition was also a means of promoting tourism and strengthening friendship and cultural relations between different nations.

To show appreciation to all the participants and celebrate the success of the event, Hussein Ismail, general manager of the hotel, threw a dinner party after which he presented awards to the top riders including Egypt's Karim El-Zoghby, named best rider.

New for Newcastle

AFTER five successful years at the helm, Kevin Keegan has resigned as manager of the Premier League team, Newcastle. His surprise departure comes as Newcastle is in fourth place, five points behind league-leading Liverpool. "It was my decision and my decision alone," Keegan, 45, said.

Newcastle fans reacted with shock to the news. "People are saying it's like the Queen dying," commented John Regan, secretary of Newcastle's independent supporter's club. "But I think it's worse. In five years Keegan has achieved a football miracle."

Squashed

WORLD champion, Jansher Khan faces a month-long ban and a fine from the Professional Squash Association (PSA) for pulling out of last month's Mahindra International in Bombay.

The Pakistani cited "fears for his safety" as the reason for his last-minute withdrawal from the three-day tournament. But the excuse failed to gain the sympathy of the PSA.

The zero points imposed by the association on his record has placed Khan in danger of losing his world number one spot for the first time in three and a half years. The zero points have dragged his computer average down to 1007.8 — a mere 1.133 above that of the Australian, Rodney Eyles. The Queenslander is now within striking distance of becoming the first man from downunder to reach number one since Chris Dittmar achieved it in July, 1993.

Boxing day

IN ROUND eight of a 10-round welterweight match, Carlos Palomino, back in the ring for the first time since 1979, scored a technical knockout against Ismail Diaz. Although the bout was relatively even in the early rounds, Palomino, 47, wore Diaz down with body shots.

A former welterweight champion, Palomino retired on his 30th birthday, 10 August 1979, with a 29-3 record and 18 knockouts.

Her hurdles

SIX-time Olympic medal winner Jackie Joyner-Kersee has given up her other sport, basketball, and returned to athletics. The runner said she has no plans of competing at the Sydney Olympics.

Joyner-Kersee,34, returns in the 60-metre hurdles in next month's Millrose Games at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Racing in Dubai

THE DUBAI World Cup, touted as the world's richest horse race, will be held on 29 March with a purse of four million dollars, organisers said.

The Dubai World Cup, which was inaugurated last March, will see a dozen thoroughbreds of four years old or more run a 2,000-metre race at Dubai's Naad Al-Sheba grounds. Last year's Dubai World Cup was won by the US thoroughbred Cigar.

Swoopes hoops

SHERLY Swoopes, perhaps the biggest star of the fledgling Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), will miss most of its inaugural season for a reason that never plagued the men's league: she is pregnant.

The 25-year-old Olympic gold medalist is due to deliver just before the WNBA season begins on June 21. The hoop star views the arrival as a slight interruption and plans to resume playing in August. "I'm very excited about it," she said, "People can suffer a variety of injuries, and this is one sort of an injury we know about ahead of time."

Egypt two in group two

Following a 0-1 defeat by Tunisia in the first-leg, the Egyptian national football team is in second place in group two of the African World Cup qualifications

Standings of group two

Nation	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	P
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Egypt	2	1	0	1	7	2	3
Liberia	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Namibia	2	0	1	1	1	7	1

The Tunisian national team honoured the memory of their late defender Hadi Ben Rekhissa by defeating Egypt 1-0 at home in a North African showdown marred by the imposition of four cautions for rough play.

The players displayed a decided degree of toughness towards each other as they played in the mud caused by the continuous rain. Just as the Egyptians lost a chance to score a victory or even a draw, so too did the Tunisians lose several chances against the ultra-cautious Egyptians, after outstanding midfielder Zoubeir Beya scored the crucial goal 10 minutes into the match.

Tunisia, runner up to South Africa in the African Nations Cup, with six points to Egypt's three, opened up with a decided advantage over the Egyptians in group two.

Following the match, the Tunisian players celebrated their victory by running around the track greeting fans and holding aloft Rekhissa's shirt.

The defeat poses a danger to Egypt's chances of qualifying for next year's World Cup finals in France. Egypt's only chance is the admittedly slim hope of winning its match against Liberia with a at least a 1-0 victory. Drawing or losing will mean that the team loses its chance to qualify, and its second-leg match against Tunisia in Cairo will have been for nought.

Meanwhile, Tunisia leads the group and any away victory for its team places an obstacle before the Egyptian team as it endeavours to maintain the three point difference. Egypt and Tunisia are scheduled to meet in Cairo on 6 June in the second-leg match.

The other two teams in the group, Liberia and Namibia, are both stuck on one point after Saturday's 0-0 tie. Liberia sorely missed injured world footballer of the year, George Weah and the suspended James Debbah during the match in Namibia, where a scoreless draw left both countries with little hope of making an impression.

Other matches were held during the weekend in the five groups including Nigeria's Olympic champions, Super Eagles, who are struggling to make it to the World Cup. Nigeria was held to a 1-1 tie by Kenya in Nairobi and fell two points behind Guinea in the group one standings of African zone qualifiers.

Kenya, sporting a new team with an average age of 21, held star-studded Nigeria 1-1.

Thanks to first-half goals by Souleymane Oulare and Omoh Wendel Soumah, Guinea won 2-0 in an away game against Burkina Faso to open up a lead in the standings. The result gives Guinea a maximum six points from two group one games.

Ghana staged a dramatic comeback for a 2-2 draw against Morocco in the most thrilling World Cup qualifying match this weekend. The North Africans silenced a 50,000 seat capacity crowd in the central town of Kuasi as goals from Saleheddine Bassir and Moustafa Hadji gave the team a comfortable lead.

Ghana needed two goals in the last six minutes to salvage a 2-2 tie when they rallied with 10 minutes to go for the match.

Morocco leads group five with four points after two rounds and Sierra Leone, a late replacement for disqualified Burundi, jumped from the bottom to the second spot by defeating Gabon 1-0 in Freetown.

Zimbabwe romped to a 3-0 victory over the weakest team in group four, Togo. Vitalis Takawira scored twice, including a penalty, and Czech based striker Kennedy Chihuri added the other for Zimbabwe.

African champions South Africa stayed on course to qualify for the World Cup from group three with a 0-0 draw in Zambia, while Congo sprang another surprise by holding Zaire 1-1 in Kinshasa.

Cameroon, seeking a record third consecutive appearance at the World Cup, managed only a 0-0 draw in group four at home to Angola, whose largely Portuguese-based team ranks among the most improved in Africa.

Marshalling for martial arts

The Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation's recently granted honour of hosting the 1997 World Cup has highlighted the martial art's domestic predicament. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

The Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation, in a reflection of its international regard, has won a bid to host the World Cup in Egypt next March. But unless the federation comes up with the LE400,000 needed to host and organise the tournament, the potential for embarrassment is high.

"Although the Egyptian tae kwon do team is ranked third in the world after South Korea and Mexico, we [the federation] are saddled with public apathy and a small budget," commented Amr Khairi, manager of the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation. The federation's poor financial situation doesn't allow the team to compete in the wide spectrum of international competitions needed to hone their technical skill. Khairi pointed out the plight of the federation as it strives to keep afloat under accumulated arrears to maintain the national team's world rank.

As the coupon clipping poor relation, the Tae Kwon Do Federation is forced to shop around for tournaments that will host the team gratis such as the South Korean offer extended to the federation. Unfortunately the Korean competition was the sole invitation the federation received for all of 1996. The circumstances have left the team ill-equipped to strongly contend with the cup.

By the laws of conventional wisdom, the team should, as runner-up in the last World Cup, enjoy abundant fan and financial domestic support. But the federation owes the Olympic Centre at Maadi a significant portion of the LE150,000 annual budget granted by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

For the players, the fiscal developments have had a lesser affect than the continuing failure of the public to recognise their achievement. Tae kwon do, although it is a martial art practised by many Egyptians, has yet to build up an audience even though the national team has collected many medals. The laurels include a gold medal won when tae kwon do was a demonstration sport in the past two Olympiads.

According to Khairi, tae kwon do will be an Olympic game in Sydney Australia, and Egypt will do well if the athletes receive the same attention from officials as other world champions. "We are not asking for the impossible nor that our players get LE12,000 a year," Khairi said, "All we are asking is for support to match our progressive rank over the world."

In an attempt to raise the profile of the sport, the federation organised a two day international competition last week. The Al-Ahram Organisation sponsored competition hosted the top five countries in the martial arts; South Korea, Turkey, Denmark, and Taiwan. The tournament boosted the players' morale, and was considered a *prova generale* before the World Cup in March.

But the new found interest does little to ease the federation's debt, nor does it secure the currency to organise the World Cup. The failure of the federation to locate sponsors and secure a grant from the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports will bode ill for tae kwon do artists' hopes for the Sydney Olympics.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly

16 - 22 January 1997





Raafat El-Mihi: Look on in anger

The recipient of the 1996 Golden Pyramid is a bundle of contradictions. He would take issue with the very ground upon which he stands. But he knows all about happy endings

Raafat El-Mihi is in many ways that *Enemy of the People* who angers many by putting forward arguments which contradict common sense. Like Ibsen's intellectual, El-Mihi has found himself more than once engaged in battle against the very people with whom he longed to communicate. A number of his films have landed him in court, accused of degrading the profession, of violating moral sensibility. Those who see him as an enemy, and sued him for it, include professionals angered by his negative portrayal of a colleague, or simply moral crusaders offended by a scene in one of his films.

It is to be expected that El-Mihi lands in hot water so often, for he is not a film maker in the narrow sense of the word, but a political activist who has resorted in the past 20 years to various forms of intellectual production, including political articles in newspapers, in an attempt to share something that angers and disturbs him with a wider public.

"I produce films as a way of venting anger and ideas that disturb me. Fortunately, my apprenticeship as a literature student and someone dabbling in literary criticism had taught me that good artists can extract from the most personal of obsessions something of general value. The late Lebanese film critic Samir Nasri said that individualism was my trade mark. It is certainly true that my points of departure are my personal worries, but then I try to mould these worries into an entertaining form. After all, who is Raafat El-Mihi to plague the public with his personal worries? I would be a fool if I expected them to sympathise. The good thing about my social background is that it is common enough to be representative of a large sector of this society. Thus people do not view my films as personal confessions, rather they see themselves in these films. But of course I never begin a film unless there is a question in my mind, even an obsession."

Those familiar with any of the films El-Mihi directed and produced, from *Oyoun La Tanam* ("Eyes that Do Not Sleep") in 1981, his first film, to *Toffaha* ("Apple"), his last, which brought him the Golden Pyramid at the 1996 Cairo International Film Festival, can easily discern the contradictions which torture members of the lower middle class, although of course these contradictions acquire an artistic nature, and an eccentric twist, under El-Mihi's ministrations. Still, his preoccupations, at least as far as the big questions are concerned, concern the nature of the contradiction between old, established morality and traditions produced by a specific social history, and the values of a rapidly changing modern life, as felt by the lower middle class, dancing on the ladder between dreams of upward mobility and threats of sinking into the depths of lower class deprivation. At the heart of this there lies the question of tradition versus modernity.

With customary candour, El-Mihi says: "I am against the past and nostalgia for things past. Yes, there is something called heritage, but this term in my view is an empty word unless seen through the prism of the individual. I am what I am because of a personal history constituted by my personal experiences and readings. I have an obsession with the future, and all my films are attempts to battle with a number of taboos that in my view hinder the development of society. Whether dressed in religious, moral or traditional garb, those taboos block the development of the individual. I hate talking in totalitarian terms, such as Egypt, the nation, etc. There is no such thing as a free society without a free individual. Thus if my films deal with individuals torn between old and new, this is because I am interested in the means of liberating oneself from the shackles of the past. Naturally, middle class morality is the main target of my attacks, this is the class I know best as I was born and raised within its confines."

In unveiling the dominant double standards, El-Mihi sometimes pushes the inherent contradictions of his characters to extremes, resorting to a form described as fantasy by his critics. El-Mihi himself does not like the term, and argues that any careful reading of his work will reveal the existence of two parallel worlds that represent two, equally realistic, possibilities for the development of his characters and events.

"Isn't schizophrenia very real, even though it involves living in two worlds simultaneously? I am partly responsible for the term fantasy, now applied to most of my films. When I was taken to court for defaming the legal profession in *Al-Avocato* ("The Lawyer"), my lawyer advised me to say that the film was a fantasy. That was a strategy for protecting oneself in the court, but somehow the term remained with me.

"The only one film that can correctly be termed a fantasy within the whole body of my production is *Samak, Laban, Tamr Hindi* ("Hodgepodge"). Other than that, all my other films may employ certain imaginative technical devices to break the monotony of traditional narration, but they remain heavily engaged in a multi-faceted reality that requires imagination to depict the various possibilities."

But perhaps the notion of fantasy as characteristic of El-Mihi's cinematic idiom also stems from his rejection of text-book directing techniques. "I discovered that a lot of the academic stuff we learned is simply wrong. What makes good art is form, not content. Years back, when I was writing my MA thesis in literature I found an American book in the library entitled *36 Situations* summing up the subject matter of great artistic productions. So the new element is not the event — there could indeed be only 36 basic situations — but the vision of the artist, the style and form he adopts. That is what makes his work original, even if he has only 36 situations to draw on.

This insistence on the supremacy of form in any artistic production may perhaps come as a great surprise to those who have seen El-Mihi at union meetings and public debates. He is always the loudest, the most agit-prop. El-Mihi has voiced his opinion, very loudly, at almost every public controversy the country has witnessed during the past twenty years, from the debate over secularism to heated discussions of the 1991 Gulf War and the peace process.

"I am not just a director, I am also a citizen and a writer who can use his pen effectively in the service of the things he feels most passionately about. While ambiguity is something to be cherished in art, an article cannot be good unless it is clear. I wrote some of my most polemical articles in defence of rational thinking and freedom of the press, because I could see a threat that had to be met head-on. There was no room there for wishy-washy, ambiguous statements. Anything I produce is motivated by my anger at something, but I cannot produce a film every time I get angry. I express this anger directly in public. My films are also expressions of anger and involvement, but they have to abide by the laws governing the production of art in order to be effective."

Being a rebel in a profession heavily dependent on an often fickle market can be quite risky, and may entail simply being put out of circulation for long dry spells. The cliché of the artist reneging on earlier ideals to be able to remain in the market is not a stereotype for nothing. But Raafat El-Mihi does not perceive selling out as the real threat.

"What scares me more is that I may be wrong, and that one day I may wake up to discover that I was fighting windmills. Or that I was ascribing to my work an importance that was never there. Last year, after the screening of my film *Meet Full* ("Perfect") and the lukewarm reception it got, I was really shaken. I told myself that, if neither critics nor spectators can read the various levels I articulated in that film, maybe I was wrong. Thus, it was with great relief that I received the award for my following film. The jury that year was quite tough, it included the founder of the Venice festival and one of the people at the vanguard of Czech cinema. I told myself, if these people can see something in my film worth the first prize, then maybe I am not all that wrong. As for making concessions for the sake of money, nobody can force me to do that. I did not do it when my children were young and I needed money, and I shall not do it now that they have grown up and I have nobody but myself to worry about."

Still, a film cannot be produced without money, big money at that. To avoid the constraints of petro-dollars and foreign-financed productions, Raafat El-Mihi has been a pioneer for the past 15 years, producing his own films, and those of some new directors, depending only on loans from local banks.

"Many of the Egyptian films produced now depend on non-Egyptian sources of finance. Some of those who failed, or who were unwilling to depend on petro-dollars, welcomed dependency on the French franc. So we have a market saturated with petro-dollar films with no artistic value or even relevance to our society, on one hand, and on the other we have a number of beautiful films dictated by the considerations of a powerful Francophone institution with its own agenda — and with a list of priorities which may be very different from that of our local market. We have seen many talented Arab directors producing good films in their countries, and once they go to France they produce second-rate films that cater to the need of this or that French TV channel.

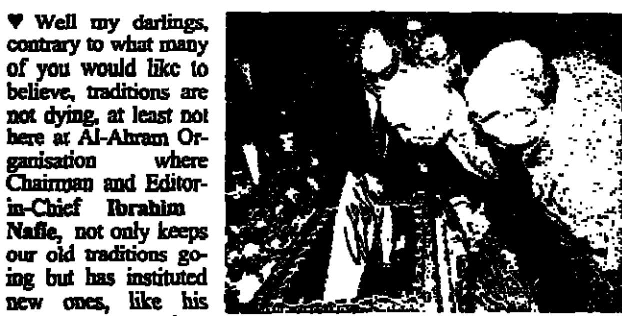
"Of course there are exceptions: some Arab directors have produced excellent films from within this Francophone framework. Palestinian director Michele Khalifi and the Tunisian Nasir Khomir are among those exceptions. To be able to work in America or France and still make your film exactly as you would have liked is praiseworthy. But to go there and produce things that only confirm pre-existing images, peddling all the ugly images of our society, is really shameful. Western audiences who go to see such films do not see them for their artistic worth, but view them the same way they would read an anthropological article about the customs and habits of this or that tribe."

Isabelle Stenger writes: "Those who want to remain faithful to the traditions they inherited and grew up with must learn how to confront them." This could be El-Mihi's motto: the ideals of the middle class are both his solid base and the site of a fierce battle against all forms of middle class hypocrisy. On the street, as we leave his office, I watch him, in his old-fashioned suit, climbing into his old car, ready to go back to work. And I remember: "I made *Toffaha* with a happy ending because of something I recently learned from a colleague. He told me people are miserable. To make them think, you have to provide them with some joy."

Profile by ***Hosni Abdel-Rehim***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris





Happy birthday Nafie

♥ Well my darlings, contrary to what many of you would like to believe, traditions are not dying, at least not here at Al-Ahram Organisation where Chairman and Editor-in-Chief Ibrahim Nafie, not only keeps our old traditions going but has instituted new ones, like his birthday celebrations during which he gives his well-wishers presents instead of the other way around. I find his generosity overwhelming but I do hope that none of you dears, expects me to emulate his kindness: I only like to be given, not to give, really, so don't get any ideas. Well this year, our chairman's birthday was even more festive, as guests, conveyed after *iftar* were aglow with the Ramadan spirit which as you well know makes everything possible. And as the members of the Al-Ahram family wished Nafie a happy birthday, and drifted in the night it was obvious that once again none had been disappointed.

♣ I on the other hand did not have time to drift, rush was more like it, to attend my darling **Pakinam Handoussa**'s eightieth birthday — or so she claimed, but I don't believe a word of it. Like me, she does not look a day over thirty — which she was celebrating surrounded by three of her four daughters, **Tohfa, Soad** and **Heba, Khadiga** her great granddaughter, friends and relations. Her son **Ahmed**, ordered 80 splendid roses to be delivered just as she was cutting the scrumptious cake. It was all so delicious that **Churchill**'s nose never stopped twitching. (For those of you who were not invited Churchill is the family pet rabbit).